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Issued Weekly. Annual Subscription, $15.00. July 25, 1889.

THAT OTHER WOMAN

BY

ANNIE THOMAS

AUTHOR OF "CALLED TO ACCOUNT," ETC., ETC.

Frank F. Lovell & Co., Publishers,

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142 AND 144 WORTH STREET

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THAT OTHER WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCES MR. PHILLIPPS-TWYSDEN.

"VIOLET, not even to please you, will I ever give another ball. Where my own house ends and Elkington begins, I can no more tell than I can say what has become of the lost tribe of Israel."

"That shows how beautifully it's done, mamma dear."

"Oh! it's all very well for you to say that and to generally take it easy, you monkey," the mother said, with pretended impatience; "but, remember, the responsibility of sorting ourselves to-morrow rests on me to a great extent. If all things are not in place by nine o'clock to-morrow morning, your father will be in what Jackson calls one of his 'poor tempers.'"

"Everything *will* be in place," Miss Grove replied, in her most definite tone. "Everything always is in place when you will it so, mamma. Just come and look at my dress before you go to your own room, that will comfort you and recompense you for all your trouble."

The graceful, gazelle-eyed, sleek, dark-haired twenty-years-old daughter of the house clasped her arms round her handsome mother's waist coaxingly as she spoke, and the mother remembered the days of her youth, and threw aside all pretence of dissatisfaction.

"You duck!" she said, fondly, "I'm glad the dress pleases you, but I've no time to look at it till it's on you.

Vi! I'm late already, and if I'am not down to receive the inevitable *too* early guest, Lady Halford will get hold of the fact and retail it to my social disadvantage. How that woman hates us, to be sure!"

"What *does* it matter?" Violet asked scornfully, as she went up the broad staircase by her mother's side.

"It matters this," Mrs. Grove answered sharply. "Her son has eighty thousand a year, one of the eldest baronetcies, and is much under his mother's thumb."

"Again I ask, 'What does it matter?'" said Miss Violet, tossing her handsome little head; and her mother, pausing at her dressing-room door, answered:

"It matters *everything* to me, Vi, that Lady Halford should find no flaw in either of us to-night, for I've set my heart on your succeeding her. You know Sir Lionel likes you; you may turn the liking into something else to-night if you're careful, and you don't care for anyone else."

"No—nor for him either—he looks like a squashed duck," said Violet, laughing. But though she said this she remembered her mother's words vividly all the time she was dressing, and when she went down to the brilliantly-lighted, magnificently-decorated ball-room, which had risen as if by magic during the day, she was well disposed to meet that fate half-way which could make her a baronet's wife with eighty thousand a year!

"She's not a beauty, but she's preeminently graceful and distinguished. My mother can't help approving of her style."

This was what Sir Lionel Halford said to Mr. Phillipps-Twysden as the two men—after dining together and looking in for an hour or two at a Shakesperian revival at the Lyceum, in which Ellen Terry excelled herself in the matters of dress and dementia, as "Ophelia"—were being whirled at midnight towards "The Grove Ball" in Hyde Park Gardens.

"And it goes without saying that Miss Grove will pose at her best for your sake before Lady Halford?"

Phillipps-Twysden asked this question with a scarcely perceptible sneer which the other man half suspected, but was not quite sure of.

"It goes without saying, Twysden, that Miss Grove is not a girl to be chafed about, or to speculate about. I haven't the faintest reason to suppose for a moment that she'd accept me. But I'm as clear gone on her as a fellow can be, and I want my mother to like her."

"I seem to know something of Mrs. Grove," Phillipps-Twysden said, lazily. "She's a plucky, high-spirited, clever sort of woman; first-rate amateur actress, recitationist, and all that sort of thing, isn't she?"

"One of our best amateur actresses, I believe," Sir Lionel replied.

"Ah! so I've heard; delightful mother-in-law she'll be; an unfailing tap of entertainment to turn on when you have Halford full of more or less bored people at Christmas and Easter."

His remarks were cut short by the brougham being pulled up with a jerk at the carpeted entrance to the brilliantly-illuminated house. And five minutes afterwards Sir Lionel Halford was introducing his friend, Mr. Phillipps-Twysden, for whom he had taken the liberty of asking for a card of invitation, to his beaming, gracious, handsome hostess, Mrs. Grove.

The introduction over, the two men fell back to make room for others, and as they stood for a minute with their backs against a tapestried wall, their portraits may be briefly painted in black and white.

Sir Lionel Halford, a short, rather stout young man, with a round, plain, hairless face of very rosy hue, surmounted by closely-cropped yellow hair, was not exactly the man at first sight to strike a young girl's fancy. But if a young girl had been wise she would have read his goodness and truth, his integrity and honorableness in every line of that candid unsullied visage, in every glance of the

frank, steady, clear blue eyes. And even if he had not been a baronet with £80,000 a year, she would have preferred him to the distinguished-looking man who lounged by his side.

Unfortunately, young girlhood, if it is not mercenary, is apt to be incautious and indiscriminating. Violet was attracted by Mr. Phillipps-Twysden as soon as she saw him, even before he had laid himself out to please and dazzle her. He was a fine man, carrying himself like a soldier; and he was a good-looking man, with a square, strong face, and clever, determined grey eyes. There was no semi-effeminate soft seductiveness about him. He looked bold and strong and clever. His style was excellent, and when he spoke his voice completed the charm. It was a voice whose tones had the real true ring of manliness in them, Violet felt convinced. Other men might have softer, fuller, richer, more musical voices, but this man's had a compelling power about it that aroused her attention and delighted her ear.

When he was introduced to her and asked her to dance, she looked up with a flash of pleasure in her eyes which she made no attempt to conceal. And Sir Lionel, standing by, saw the pleased expression, grasped the meaning of it, and lost a shade of that rosy hue which usually adorned his face. He watched the pair as Phillipps-Twysden led the girl off; watched with an anxious, almost sad look on his face that was very foreign to it, and that struck more than one on-looker, giving them the clue to the state of his feelings.

Sir Lionel had never made sure of the girl he loved. He had never done her the wrong of supposing that she would marry him for his title and money if she were quite indifferent to him. But there had been times during the present season when he had fancied that she was not indifferent to him. More than this, by reason of his mother's constant hints and innuendoes and sneers

about "Miss Grove," he had been inspired with a certain amount of confidence. Lady Halford broadly asserted that "Miss Grove was trying her hardest to catch him," and he had grown to hope this was the case, though his eyes and heart were never gladdened by witnessing any of her attempts in that direction.

Altogether, he had been chaffed, and warned, and cautioned into a rather sanguine spirit, and, as he had hinted to his friend Phillipps-Twysden, he had resolved to try his fate with Violet that night. It made him feel a little sad and sore, therefore, when Violet turned from him after the briefest recognition and greeting, and allowed her eyes and manner to tell the tale of the gratification and pleasure she experienced in looking at, and listening to, his attractive friend.

For Violet Grove was not a coquette. The love-stricken baronet did not do her the injustice for a moment of thinking that she was feigning to retreat in order that he might pursue more ardently.

"She's taken with him. I wish I hadn't been ass enough to bring him!" he was saying to himself, when he felt a sharp tap from a fan on his shoulder, and looking round, found himself face to face with his mother.

She was a vivacious little lady, with bright dark eyes, a thin hooked nose, and nice white hair that she wore raised high from her forehead in a way that was intended to suggest a resemblance someone had once discovered in her to Marie Antoinette. Sir Lionel was her only son, and she prized him highly, both as the fifteenth baronet and as her own dear only boy. She prized him highly, and loved him dearly, and gave all her best energies and the greater part of her time to the task of keeping him out of the clutches of ineligible young women.

During the last three months, Violet Grove had been her ladyship's heaviest cross and special aversion, and this not because of anything detrimental in Violet's manner, or

looks, or family, or position; but simply because she wanted a duke's daughter for her son!—she whose father had been a pork merchant, and who had known no higher ambition than to marry his manager till her Marie Antoinette-like beauty had fascinated a baronet's son at a ball at the Mansion House.

But that was then! this was now! Lady Halford had almost forgotten this pork-valetier, and quite identified herself, as became a good wife, with the noble stock into which she had married. A duke's daughter was ready and waiting for Lionel, thanks to his mother's unremitting endeavors! This being the case, it is no wonder that she could almost have slain Violet Grove with the fan with which she tapped her son's shoulder as she marked his face fall as Violet walked off with Phillipps-Twysden.

"What a handsome pair;" she murmured, admiringly, as she followed her son's sorrowful glance after Violet.

"Don't they look well!" he said quickly. "Wouldn't she look well anywhere?"

Old Lady Halford put her glass in her eye and peered after Violet Grove.

"She's a stylish girl, undoubtedly," she said, pleasantly, "holds herself well, and has a pretty smile! I don't think Mr. Phillipps-Twysden can do better."

Old Lady Halford said all this in her kindest and most motherly manner. Her son had no reasonable grounds of offence with her; nevertheless, her words and the way she said them, vexed him sorely. Why should she see something in Violet's manner towards Phillipps-Twysden that he would not wish her to see in the manner of the girl he loved? What was there to see? Nothing! He turned and smiled straight in his mother's eyes as he replied:

"I don't think Phillipps-Twysden will do so well. She's a dear girl. Mother, if I bring her to you as your daughter to night, you'll give her a kind welcome, won't you?"

"Go and dance," his mother said, shaking her head reprovingly; "you've been dining; go and dance, and, by-and-bye, bring Mr. Phillipps-Twysden to me. I like to talk to him. I like him better than most of your friends. If you can detach him from Miss Grove bring him to me."

Then Lady Halford sauntered on to say a few words in season to her hostess; and Sir Lionel, as the Blue Hungarians clashed out the last bars of the waltz, went off to claim Violet for the next dance.

Mrs. Grove, looking very handsome and very happy, was still hard at work doing her duty of receiving as Lady Halford joined her. There was a confidential air about her ladyship, and a meaning smile on her lips that caused Mrs. Grove involuntarily to prepare herself for something unpleasant. Lady Halford's first words, however, seemed harmless enough.

"I have just been saying to my son that your daughter quite outshines every other girl in the room," Lady Halford murmured, not too veraciously.

"I am glad you think so," Mrs. Grove said heartily, feeling almost disarmed.

"Oh! I assure you, there can't be two opinions about it. Miss Grove and Mr. Phillipps-Twysden are a most striking pair. Have you known him long?"

"Sir Lionel brought him here for the first time to-night."

"The first time. Indeed! I think I shall soon have to congratulate you, Mrs. Grove! I never saw such a complete case at first sight! Lionel and I were watching them just now, and we were quite amazed. Mr. Phillipps-Twysden makes no attempt to conceal his admiration and devotion."

"Indeed! to whom?" Mrs. Grove interrupted coldly. She had allowed herself to be disarmed too soon, and now she was sharply wounded. Sir Lionel *amazed* at witnessing another man's devotion to, and admiration for Violet! It was crushing!

"Why, to your daughter, of course," Lady Halford laughed. "And I consider it quite a matter of congratulation, I assure you! Such a very superior man, so cultivated and intellectual, and all that sort of thing, and the very soul of integrity and honor. If I had a daughter I should aspire to no higher lot for her than to see her the wife of such a man."

Mrs. Grove drew herself up and looked down commandingly and scornfully on the widow of the baronet.

"You are an injudicious partisan," she said coolly. "You plead a wholly imaginary cause, and are very premature in your congratulations. However, I have no doubt you will be one of the first to know of my daughter's engagement when it does take place."

She turned her head aside to speak to someone else when she had said those last words, with the conviction that in uttering them she had revenged herself for the wound Lady Halford had given her a few minutes previously. As she did so Violet passed her on Sir Lionel's arm on their way from the ball-room. He was speaking very earnestly, and Violet was listening with an expression of mingled gravity and embarrassment on her face.

Mrs. Grove's heart gave a thump of exultation.

"He is proposing to her this minute! His mother will regret having wasted her ill-natured words on me presently," she thought, and more than one of her guests saw the smile of triumph which flashed across her face at the thought, and fathomed the reason of it.

Meanwhile, Sir Lionel had led Violet to a sheltered seat behind a group of huge palms in the conservatory, and there, sorely against her will, she had to listen to words that she would have given much to have saved him from uttering.

All that he said need not be recorded. Though, indeed, his words were not many, they were thoroughly to the point.

"I'm not worthy of you—no one can feel that more strongly than I do, Violet—but I love you like my life."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, so sorry!" she broke in, "pray, pray don't say another word, Sir Lionel; you have done me a great honor, but I can't accept it, and I'm wretched."

"Is it" (and his voice broke as he asked it) "some other fellow?"

"I can't tell you, don't ask me anything; let me go back, and forgive me, Sir Lionel."

CHAPTER II.

"IF HE WERE THE BARONET I SHOULD STILL SAY THE SAME!"

When Violet escaped from Sir Lionel, he, with his ears still tingling with the smarting sound of her unqualified and unexpected rejection, made his escape from the house as soon as possible, without attempting to take leave of anyone.

The rooms were by that time so crowded that his departure was not noticed, nor his presence missed even by the two who were most powerfully interested in him, namely, his own mother and Violet's. But Mr. Phillipps-Twysden soon became conscious of the fact of his friend having gone, and, correctly enough, associated that circumstance with Violet's pale face and red eyes.

From that moment he sought her more assiduously than before, for every bit of small ambition within him was roused into activity by the desire to conquer where Halford had failed. So he tried to throw all the subduing influence of which he was possessed into the grey eyes and decided flexible eyebrows that enabled him to exercise facial expression with such consummate skill.

But though he had already made up his mind that Violet Grove should be his wife, he had too great a sense of pro-

portion in matters of tact and taste to approach the subject verbally until time should have softened the raw edges of that compassion and regret which Violet, being a generous girl, could not help feeling for the "man who had lost."

Though, however, he said nothing that could be construed into verbal love-making, he said enough to make the girl understand that he hoped and expected to see a great deal more of her, not only in the immediate future, but in that coming by-and-bye, which "John Anderson, my Joe, John's" wife, has by her address elevated into a poetic period.

So it came about that as the later strains rang out, and the later waltzes were being danced, Violet had a novel, thrilling, excited sense of happiness which she had never experienced before, and under its enthralling influence she forgot to be regretful about the man who was her true lover she knew—though not a successful one.

Once or twice in the course of the night old Lady Halford nodded, and blinked, and smiled smiles full of obnoxious understanding at Violet. The girl had wondered at these signs half-indignantly, and had not responded to them. But though Lady Halford was tired, and at all times, even when unfatigued, ready to find some fault or flaw in Miss Grove, she felt well pleased enough with her on this occasion. The protecting maternal instinct told her that her son would be safe in the future from this special young woman's wiles at least! And there was the Duke's daughter reposefully in the background waiting for him!

It was rosy dawn before the latest lingering guest got away from the ball, that in the rush of London life was utterly effaced from everyone's mind before noon. As Violet reached her room and put down the big posy of violets of every shade, from white to darkest blue, she put her lips, with a little tremulous motion, to a space from whence two—a shaded Neapolitan and a Russian blue—

had been extracted. "I shall always keep them! May I?" Mr. Phillipps-Twysden had murmured as he took possession of the violets. And Violet Grove had certainly not forbidden him to keep them; indeed, though she said nothing, he seemed well satisfied with her silence.

Very few of her waking thoughts were given to Sir Lionel Halford. She had liked him well enough, but had never been attracted, interested, or influenced by him, and she felt that she could be—that she was, in fact—by his friend, whom he introduced to precipitate his own downfall.

But when she was dressed the next morning, and the moment came for her to go down and face her mother, she began to remember vividly what had passed between herself and the man on whom her mother's hopes had been fixed. It was in vain that she tried to strengthen herself for the unpleasant task of avowing her refusal of him by declaring to herself that even if she had not met Phillipps-Twysden she could not have married this good, stout, short, rosy-faced baronet. In her heart of hearts she knew that had not this other man come along, the advantages of becoming Lady Halford would have turned the scale in Sir Lionel's favor. But that possibility was over and done with now, and mamma had to be faced with the disappointing truth.

Mrs. Grove was busy writing notes in her morning-room when Violet went down, and with a feeling of being reprieved—for that morning at least—Violet made her way to the dining room to have some half-cold coffee and roll, with what appetite she could. If she could only get out for a ride before her mother had finished her correspondence, they need not meet till luncheon, and by that time plans for the remainder of the day would probably be occupying Mrs. Grove's attention. At any rate, until luncheon she would not be called upon to acknowledge her indiscretion, and to attempt to justify "her folly," as she had no doubt her mother would consider it.

But as she was passing the door of Mrs. Grove's sanctum on her way down, after dressing for her ride, her mother called her in, and as Violet came forward with a slow, unwilling step, Mrs. Grove looked up brightly and asked:

"Well, dear, you have something to tell me, surely?"

"Nothing particular, mamma, only I enjoyed myself immensely." She had been about to add that she "wished last night's experiences were to come over again the next night," but remembering Sir Lionel, she thought better of it.

"Surely you have more to tell me?" Mrs. Grove said, knitting her brows impatiently. "I saw you going away with Sir Lionel to the conservatory, and I saw how savagely his mother was watching you. But after that I never got an opportunity of speaking to either of you. Come, Violet, tell me."

"Sir Lionel went away directly after you saw us go to the conservatory, that's all!" Violet stammered.

"All!"

"Yes, all, mamma! What is the use of going over it all again? Sir Lionel and I are just what we have always been—very good friends; nothing more."

"He didn't propose?"

"Yes, he did, and I refused him. Now, mamma, dont look sorry and disappointed. I thought you knew that I didn't care for him? I told you so."

"Not care for him! Oh, Violet! If I look sorry and disappointed, I do not look worse than I feel. I am very, very sorry. Bitterly, *bitterly* disappointed. You! heart-free as you are, to have refused such a man!"

Violet was dumb.

"You *are* heart-free, are you not?" Mrs. Grove went on, impatiently, "or," with a sudden recollection of old Lady Halford's hints, "was that malicious woman right when she told me that you and the man her son brought

with him appeared to be favorably impressed with one another? I *hope* not, Violet, I distrust that man. Even if he were the baronet, with wealth, and rank, and position assured, I should say the same thing. I *hope*, I think it is not this Mr. Phillipps-Twysden."

"Mamma," Violet said reproachfully, "what am I to say? He is a stranger; I may never see him again, but I like him, and I shall think about him, and I'm sure he likes me. And now—do let me go, and don't be angry with me, mother! I really can't help anything that has happened."

"Ah! but would you help if you could?" Mrs. Grove sighed, and as Violet could not give a satisfactory answer to this, she thought it would be wiser to get away for her ride without further delay.

"These things will happen, and *why* mamma should think I ought to like a podgy little man better than that splendid-looking fellow, I can't think. It's utterly unreasonable of her!" Violet thought, as she settled herself in the saddle.

Up to the present juncture, it may be observed, the horrible question of £. *s. d.* had never presented itself, as one that must be solved, to Violet Grove's mind. She had been kept so apart from all personal acquaintance with the "root of all evil," that, actually at twenty she thought more of the difference between the two men than of the difference between their incomes. It pained her to think that her mother took a mercenary view of a matter that Violet was disposed to regard as one of heart, and feeling, and sympathy, and taste alone.

"If Sir Lionel could make me a princess and give me a palace to live in, I wouldn't look at him—now," she told herself, with decision, as she turned into the Row, and at once caught sight of Mr. Phillipps-Twysden leaning over the railings on the opposite side. Then she remembered vividly what perhaps she had forgotten before, namely,

that she had told him on the previous evening that about this hour she should be riding here.

But he had replied that he was "a business man"—far too busy a man ever to be able to indulge in any morning amusements. "Think of me as chained to an office from dawn till dusk, Miss Grove, and pity me for not being able to fight my battle by daylight—as Halford can, for instance, when it pleases him"—he had said, and Violet had read between the lines of this speech, and blushed in a way that promised well for the scheme Mr. Phillipps-Twysden had conceived.

The thought that was uppermost in his mind now as Miss Grove approached him was that she was admirably turned out, and that her horse would have been cheap at a hundred guineas. "But before I go much farther I'll find out if old Grove is as sound as he seems! if he is, the fair Violet shall have her way, and I'll surrender." He smiled with tender gratitude into Violet's sweet, bending face as he thought this, and for a moment the girl broke the rules under which she rode, paused, and gave him her hand.

"I have broken my chains for once, you see, Miss Grove, and already I am rewarded for my effort. A minute ago I feared that you had forgotten you were going to ride here this morning."

"I had not forgotten," said Violet, quickly. "I hoped I should see you, but I musn't stay and chat. It's one of mother's rules, that unless papa is with me I'm not to stop to speak to anyone in the Row."

"One moment! Which is your mother's day?" he interrupted, and Violet, who felt that she was astounding the old coachman, who had ridden with her from the day she was ten until now, answered briefly—"Thursday," and rode on.

The man to whom she had given the information stood looking after her for a minute or two, then he sauntered off, thinking:

"She's good-looking in her way, and she'll please and satisfy the old boy, on the whole. I may as well settle it. Halford shan't have her!"

He went back to the city, where he traded under the old-established name of "Hornbeam, Hunting & Co., and gave his mind to business unreservedly for several hours. During those hours scarcely one thought of Violet crossed his mind, but he conjectured about her father a good deal and tried to set many of his conjectures to rest by making discreet enquiries. These latter seemed to be satisfactory.

The firm of "Grove and Pring," paint and enamel merchants, bore a stainless and prosperous record. "Grove," he was told, "was reputed to be close-fisted, indeed, but for his wife would be miserly." Pring, on the contrary, was said to be always there or thereabouts in a certain fast fashionable set, was unmarried, good-looking, and clever in most things that had nothing to do with his business. Further, he was informed that it was an open secret that the senior partner intended to have the junior one for his son-in-law, but was thwarted in his design by his ambitious wife.

"They say Mrs. Grove turns up her nose at the City, and means to get a title for her daughter," one man told him, adding, "and she'll do it, too, for that young fellow, Sir Lionel Halford, is as mad as a hatter about the girl, I hear."

It was five o'clock when Mr. Phillipps-Twysden turned his steps westward.

First he looked in at his club to gather up and reply to his private correspondence. It was one of his hard and fast rules never to have a private letter addressed either to his business house or to the chambers or lodgings in which he might be temporarily residing, "Hospitable fellow," as he was generally proclaimed to be, he invariably exercised his hospitality either at his club or at one of the palatial hotels which about this time had begun to spring

up in the Metropolis. Few, if any, of Phillipps-Twysden's most intimate friends knew where the man had his local habitation.

When he had despatched his correspondence, he got into a hansom and was driven to Upper Belgrave Street, where in a comfortably-furnished old-fashioned house he found Lady Halford graciously ready to give him half-an-hour of her amusing scandalous gossip, and a cup of excellent tea. It was the first time he had called on Lady Halford by invitation, and he had a tolerably clear idea why Lady Halford had asked him with such genial friendliness on the previous night to "drop in and enliven an old woman for half an-hour at five-o'clock tea to-morrow."

Lady Halford was alone when he went in. She regretted this circumstance verbally, telling him that she had "expected some delightful people, who had failed her." But in reality she had had herself denied to some of her dearest friends in order to improve the shining hour with Mr. Phillipps-Twysden.

Her tongue was itching to say something disparaging about the last night's ball and the giver of it. But she remembered that it was no part of her plan to make Violet's mother look ridiculous in Phillipps-Twysden's eyes. She reserved that pleasure for her son. Accordingly she began:

"As a rule, I bore myself terribly at balls, not having girls to chaperone, but the sight of that charming girl's beauty and happiness last night quite compensates me for the effort I made to go. I can't wonder at Lionel's infatuation any longer."

"Have you seen Halford to-day?" he asked.

"I have not. He promised to come in to luncheon, but I am not an exacting mother, and I quite forgive the breach of promise, if he was—where I know he would wish to be," she said, smiling beneficently.

She wanted to see this man take Violet Grove entirely

out of her son's way, therefore she did not think it necessary to tell him that she had heard her son was on the brink of leaving the country. "He must think of Lionel as a rival still, or he will grow lukewarm," she thought sagaciously.

Meanwhile he was thinking, "Does she want me to think he has a chance still, in order to egg me on? Poor old lady! She's giving herself all the trouble of being false for nothing. *I'm sure* of the girl, but I want to know what this old harpy can tell me about the girl's father and mother." So he said, suavely:

"I didn't see much of the master of the house last night; but if he's as satisfactory as the mistress of it, the Groves must be a charming family."

"Oh! he's rich and retiring!" Lady Halford laughed, as she poured rich cream into her guest's tea; "and Mrs. Grove is greatly sought in society. She has written some delightful drawing-room pieces, and she acts in them herself quite professionally, I'm told. Not a touch of the amateur about her. My son tells me she sings superbly; in fact, I've often thought that the mother must be a dangerous rival to her daughter."

"Altogether, you evidently think the Groves a most desirable family to enter. How gratified your son must be that your views accord with his own so thoroughly."

"Ah! my *dear* Mr. Phillipps-Twysden," she said, pretending to be thrown off her guard, "the Groves are all that I tell you, all, and more—much more! But I am his mother, and I feel that if Violet Grove should ever be coerced into marrying Lionel, she will not have one spark of affection for him. Think of it! Think of what a loveless marriage would be to my poor boy, and understand why I wish you well in your wooing.

She leant towards him, extending a tremulous hand and speaking with quivering lips, and he began to feel that in cutting out his friend he would be obviously fulfilling the

heart's desire of that friend's mother. But what was her motive? that was the question? In another moment Lady Halford had answered it.

"I will be quite straightforward with you, Mr. Phillipps-Twysden. I feel I can trust you. For Lionel I have other views, and if my views are carried out he will be a happy man. You know Lady Susan Meadows, the Duke of Meadshire's eldest daughter?"

No, Mr. Phillipps-Twysden had not that honor.

"Ah; then you will hardly understand my hopes and anxieties; but this I can tell you, she is the sweetest—quite the sweetest—girl in England, and she appreciates Lionel's sterling qualities. If I could see him married to Lady Susan, I could go to my grave in peace, but the image of Miss Grove obtrudes itself and blocks his road to happiness. If he could only hear that she was engaged, happily, the rest that I wish would follow."

Phillipps-Twysden had no overwhelming feeling of concern on the subject of Lady Halford's peaceful progress to the grave, but he was fired with admiration for Violet and with the idea of cutting out the wealthy baronet. Additionally the prospect of having a rich father-in-law was pleasant to him, but he developed a feeling of antagonism to Mr. Grove at once.

Accordingly he listened to Lady Halford's suggestions with an expression of polite interest that left her quite in the dark as to his intentions, and when a few minutes afterwards he took leave, she had the sore sensation that is apt to beset one who has shown her hand for nothing.

CHAPTER III.

PHILLIPPS-TWYSDEN SEEMS STAUNCH.

WHEN Sir Lionel Halford made his way out of Mrs. Grove's house, immediately after Violet's rejection of him, he was a very unhappy young man, but he was not by any means a despairing one. His heart was too heavy to allow him to stay and possibly witness the sight he dreaded, namely, that of Violet smiling upon his friend. But heavy as it was there were two or three hopeful throbs left in it still. He fully recognised the value and the power of the influence (the temporary influence, he called it) that was adverse to him. But knowing the changeful nature of the man who was exerting that influence, he told himself that it would not be for long.

Nevertheless, though he did not despair—though he had faith in the prophetic feeling which told him that Violet would turn to him when she had found the other man to be a rotten stick—he was not dogged enough to return to the charge at once. He told himself reasonably enough that to wait on Violet's change of mind was better than to worry her into changing it. So he spent several hours of that night in looking over some matters which required arrangement before he absented himself for any length of time. And by the morning his scheme was organised, and his mind was in fair travelling order.

The world was all before him where—to choose—a condition of things that is proverbially unsettling. But Sir Lionel belied the proverb, and made up his mind at once. He did not care for blue skies and sunshine, for pictures, or sublime scenery or society, so he would go

where there was something to be done that he would like to do, something that would interest him and occupy him till such time as Violet should have seen the mistake she had made. Then he would leave his healthful and interesting employment of hunting bears in the backwoods of Canada, and would come home and rectify her mistake, and thank God that he had not been a despairing fool this night.

So he proposed doing and feeling. Proposed it not bumptiously at all, but humbly and cheerfully, forgetting that he was only man.

His preparations for his journey were soon made, one of the most difficult of them being to persuade his mother into taking an agreeable view of his project. Lady Halford was furious, and showed the fury she felt—that a mere nobody like Violet Grove should have had the power of upsetting Sir Lionel Halford from the comfortable social pedestal on which nature and providence had placed him.

That a young man who was a baronet with eighty thousand a year, and a duke's daughter ready to step down and marry him, should go into the backwoods and throw himself away among bears, was incomprehensible and exasperating to the last degree to his mother. Deeper, too, than these fretful, vain and ambitious ones was the feeling that she loved him, and hated the hardships to which he might expose himself for love of Violet and bear-hunting.

"Surely you'll call at Meadshire House before you go?" she said anxiously, and her son answered.

"No, mother, the Duchess would frankly call me a fool for going out into the cold when I needn't do it, and I shouldn't be prepared with an explanation, you see."

"And Lady Susan?"

"Lady Susan! Oh! Lady Susan would probably tell me she hoped I should shoot several bears—if their skins were good. She's a nice, practical, sensible girl, is Lady Susan——"

"Oh! Lal," his mother broke out, calling him by his old baby name, "why can't you like her well enough to marry her and be happy yourself, and make your poor old mother supremely so——"

"Just because I can't, mother," he said quickly and gravely, "not that she'd have me—she's a deal too staunch to take a fellow up simply because circumstances seem to knock him down to her."

Then he went on to talk of what it would be best for his mother to do in his absence, which would probably be for a couple of years.

"Go down to Halford at Christmas and warm up the old place, won't you, mother?"

Lady Halford shrugged her shoulders.

"My being there without you would only emphasise the disadvantages the place labors under on account of your prolonged absence, Lionel; you are forgetting your duty as a land owner; you are disregarding the rights of your tenants and employés by going away in this manner. Whoever has driven or persuaded you to take this course has much to answer for."

She spoke seriously and with earnest conviction, and her son was compelled to admit to himself that she had reason and justice on her side. But he would not relinquish his plan of travel and adventure. He could not tamely stand by and wait till Violet should, through the tribulation of finding out Phillipps-Twysden's instability, come to the perfection of knowledge of himself.

"I should wish you to keep up the same establishment at Halford as if I were there, mother. Spend all you think proper on the place, and with more of my gratitude by using my funds so worthily."

"I dislike being there in your absence, Lal," she said, fretfully; "I am only the Viceroy, and I want to see a rightful queen reigning in the dear old place. Besides"—and here her voice broke with genuine pathos that

nearly melted his resolve—"I am getting old, and when you are gone I shall feel my age and loneliness bitterly. How can I go and live in a place that I have been peopling in my mind for months with the presence of one who would be as a true daughter to me? How can I go and brood in solitude in a place that I have been picturing as echoing to children's laughter and footsteps?"

"Pray God for me that I may be able to give you what you desire—pray God for me that I may have the strength to wait, and wish what you hope for," he said kindly and gently, responding to his mother's gesture of affection; and for the moment Lady Halford felt almost inclined to breathe a little prayer for her son's happiness with the girl of his heart. But a timely recollection of Lady Susan Meadows crossed her mind, and the prayer she did breathe was to the effect that Lionel might be speedily drawn towards the Duke's daughter.

However, this prayer not being answered—happily both for Lady Susan and Sir Lionel—the latter carried out his plans and started for Canada, after writing a manly tender letter to Violet Grove, begging her to think of him always as of the friend in the world who was most anxious for her welfare, and most eager to secure it in any way that seemed best to her. At the same time he told her that he should "bring his case before her again in two years, when he hoped she might consider it more kindly."

Violet read his letter, felt her eyes grow red and watery over it for a moment, and then forgot all about the writer as she listened to some gossip of the day while she was presiding at her mother's Thursday-afternoon tea-table. The retailer of the gossip was that "entertaining person—Phillipps Twysden," as Lady Halford described him—who was fast making his way into Mrs. Grove's inner circle, though without any encouragement from Mrs. Grove herself. She endured him, and did that with a bad grace.

In spite, however, of Mrs. Grove's mute but manifest

antagonism to the man of her daughter's choice, that daughter did eventually choose him, and long before Sir Lionel Halford had shot his first bear, the engagement of his friend Phillipps Twysden to Miss Violet Grove was announced, with the addenda that the marriage was to come off shortly.

A reluctant heart-aching consent was won from the girl's mother. Even this would not have been obtained if Mrs. Grove's nose had not been brought to the grindstone during a confidential conversation with her husband just previous to the offer being made.

"Is there any chance of that affair with Sir Lionel Halford and Violet coming to anything?" Mr. Grove had asked, coming into his wife's room before dinner one day on his return from the City.

Something despondent in his tones struck her ear painfully, and she looked up nervously to see him looking more moody, ashen and broken than she had ever seen anyone near and dear to her look before.

"Why do you ask? He has proposed to Violet and been refused. What is it, William?" she asked anxiously.

"Refused!" he groaned. "Merciful Heavens! Then there's nothing but ruin before us."

"Ruin!"

"Ruin!" he sobbed. "I have feared it—staved off the fear—suspected—despised myself for suspecting—watched, striven to avert—all in vain. Pring is a scoundrel, and I and my dear ones will reap the fruits of the villainy he has sown. He has gone away—heaven only knows where, after having drawn every fraction from the bank."

"But your signature must have been on the cheques? Oh, William! *what* is the worst?" she sobbed, plaintively and tremblingly, for poverty was a very dreadful thing in Mrs. Grove's estimation, though she had never tasted it, and so could not estimate it properly. Poverty was a very dreadful thing to her, but here was something worse than poverty. Here she felt intuitively was disgrace.

"My signature has been forged. Marian, don't look at me like that. All the world will blame and scout me for my credulity and carelessness, but I can come before my accusers with clean hands. My wife and child needn't blush for me. I am, I am——"

Her arms were round his neck before he could tell her what he was, but she finished the sentence for him.

"You are dearer to your wife and child than ever, William, believe that. Be brave, my dear husband, and you will find that Vi and I are not cowardly. If we are ruined in purse, we still have health and honor, and happiness in one another. Be brave! and face the worst at once."

Her advice was good, and he followed it for two reasons, the one being that he felt it to be sound; the second being that circumstances were so strongly in favor of expedition in the matter that he was compelled to face the worst at once.

The "worst" was not so bad as Mrs. Grove had feared it would be at first. True they were hurled from the old, proud, well-established, and reputed business height which had been stormed successsfully, and honorably, by Mr. Grove's grandfather and great grandfather. True they had to leave the beautiful home in which Violet had been born and reared, but what of that? They might be happy, equally happy, in a humble one, the good wife argued, cheerfully. But Mr. Grove knew that he and happiness had shaken hands for the last time. "Culpable carelessness" was the worst charge brought against his character. But when he had passed through the fires of investigation and publicity, he knew himself to be seared, marred, and maimed for life.

Through it all, to the amazement of those who knew him intimately, and greatly to his own surprise, Phillipps-Twysden remained staunch to Violet; and when the miserable affairs of the firm and family were settled, and the Groves found that they had to begin life again on less

than two hundred a year, all that could be honestly realised for them from the wreckage, Mrs. Grove had to give her consent to a fate she dreaded for her daughter; because it might be that a harder one should overtake her.

"At least, now you must admit that it's myself that he has wanted all along," Violet said.

But Mrs. Grove was not at all disposed to grant this. His present conduct seemed to be disinterested. But, though Violet was a pauper, Mrs. Grove distrusted Phillipps-Twysden as much as when Violet had been an heiress.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CLOVEN HOOF SHOWS.

FIVE years have passed since Mrs. Grove's reluctant consent was obtained to her daughter's marriage with Phillipps-Twysden. To Violet those years had brought much luxury and pleasure, one great joy !—and one ghastly disappointment !

The great joy, the joy and happiness that passed all understanding, was the birth of the little son who soon became the one object on which all her hopes in this world were fixed. From the moment that she caught sight of his unattractive little lobster-red visage, an hour or two after his birth, till now that he was a bonnie, beautiful boy of four, he had been the sole heart-sunshine of her life.

She had a charming house; an equally charming circle of friends; a plentiful supply of money to expend on that house and in entertaining those friends, and decorating the persons of herself and child ! and—there it ended ! These things were palliative substitutes for happiness, but they no more made happiness in the big generous heart of the woman who exercised the power they gave, than would

the sight of one of the masterpieces of the greatest painter the world has ever known assuage the pangs of a penniless wretch, starving for want of a bit of bread.

The fact was that Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden, the wife of the senior partner of a firm whose wealth and prosperity had become a proverb in the City, had no more power to relieve that often necessitous and always poverty-stricken condition of her father and mother than you or I have.

The distrust and intuitive antagonism with which Mrs. Grove had regarded Phillipps-Twysden from the day of his introduction to her was returned by him with bitter hatred from the day he became her son-in-law. It gave him absolutely pleasurable sensations to know that he had been and still was the means of rendering null and void the intense desire Violet had to help her mother.

"If I ever find that a penny of mine makes its way into the pocket of that mother of yours, by Jove! I'll stop your allowance, Violet, and pay the smallest of your bills by cheque!" the bridegroom kindly observed to his bride on the day of their return from the wedding tour, which had been a dream of felicity from which she speedily awakened, and into which she was never destined to relapse. Violet's mind had refused to grasp the full meaning of his words at first. But he soon made them painfully clear to her. And from that moment she realised that she had made an irretrievable mistake, and tasted the first fruits of her disregard of her mother's counsel.

"Do you mean that, rich as I am—rich as *you* are at least—that I am to see mamma harassed and worried for want of a little money, and not give it to her?" she asked, nearly choking with anger and amazement.

"You needn't witness the disturbing state of feeling you describe, my dear one," he laughed. "I am going to be rather particular where my wife goes, and among other places already marked in my mind to be avoided is your mother's house!"

"John!"

She could say no more, but rage and amazement, the despair and desperation in her face were eloquent.

"You feel it so much, do you?" he said angrily. "Look here, Violet, let us understand each other clearly. You have made me believe that you loved me above and beyond everyone in the world. Have you lied to me?"

"You have believed the truth—it was the truth till now."

"I married you in this belief—nothing else would have made me marry the penniless daughter of a ruined man, and of a flighty, defiant woman, whom I have always detested——"

"You shall *not* speak so of my mother——"

"I shall speak of your mother as I please. She has always hated me, because I came in Halford's way, on whom, if you'd married him, she would have fattened. Now, I'll repay her in kind! She shall not benefit either by your love or my lucre. If you ever go to her it will be in direct defiance of my orders——"

"I shall defy them, I shall go to my mother!"

"Oh! very well! she's quite capable of encouraging you to disobey your husband, or to wrong him in any way. Yes, that's my opinion of your mother, my dearest one, and the sooner you respect that opinion the better for you."

"I shall never respect either your opinion or you again," the young wife said, broken-heartedly.

"That's quite a detail, as long as you obey me," he said, coolly.

"I shall not obey you. As for your money—your vile money, of which you think so much—my mother wouldn't defile her fingers by touching it. But I shall give her my love and presence freely——"

"Well, you'll have no opportunity just yet," he interrupted smilingly, "for I wrote to her from Paris, telling her we should remain abroad till Christmas, and so, as

she had no chance of seeing you, she's gone off to recite and make a fool of herself at some North-country and Scotch institutes and music halls. A nice thing for *my* mother-in-law to be doing, by Jove! I'd as soon hear of her dancing in tights and spangles in a booth at a village fair!"

Thus it was that Mr. Phillipps-Twysden drew the line, and marked out the spaces along and in which his wife was to move. Thus it was that her married life of cutting disappointment began.

Now, five years had passed over her head since these bitter words had been exchanged between her husband and herself. The taste of these words was as bitter in her mouth as ever, but to a certain extent she had disregarded them and treated the restrictions they enforced as non-existent things. As she had declared she would do, she had done, namely, given her love and her presence to her mother "freely," but not "frequently." For during those five years Mrs. Grove had been incessantly on the treadmill, now in Edinburgh or Glasgow. Now in Dublin or Cork. Now through the chief towns of the western counties. Always striving to make a little extra fund wherewith to meet the expenses of the little home in a London suburb, where the once rich merchant was wearing out his broken life in unavailing regrets, and futile efforts to occupy his mind with books and an uninteresting little garden.

It was a terrible drop for the woman who had been one of the best amateur actresses on some of the most exclusive private boards in London. But she refused to acknowledge herself shattered or even shaken by the fall. At first she had nourished the hope of getting on the stage. But she had neither youth, beauty, nor great social influence to back her now, and there was always plenty of talent in the market, she learnt. So, after a time, she accepted the inevitable, and fought her way to the rough and ill-repaid

platform, beyond which few popular reciters and entertainers may hope to soar.

She was a good-looking woman still. In the days of her prosperity and perfect dressing she had been a very handsome and elegant one. But inferior materials and a third-rate dressmaker can do as much towards the destruction of a woman's appearance as even her worst enemy could desire. Moreover, just when she needed it most, the prettiest and most taking part of her assured manner deserted her. She felt herself shiver and lose nerve and height the first time she made her bow as a paid entertainer before a large institute full of worthy critical intelligent mechanics and artisans. But after a time she recovered her right judgment, and worked as heartily for the interest and approval of her audience in fustian and cotton as she had of old for the applause of a houseful of her royal and aristocratic friends and supporters.

In fact, she compelled herself to discern the real from the unreal, the work-a-day living present from the dead past, with its seductive delusive glamor. So it came to pass that, after many a struggle and rebuff, her way of life came to be an ascertained one, fixed and settled, and fairly remunerative. And for relaxation she had Violet's letters, and the sight of Violet for an hour or two whenever she could spend a few days at home with her husband in the little house in Park Village East.

A high-spirited, clear-sighted, and sensible woman, Mrs. Grove never permitted herself either to moan over the defection of the many, or the patronage of the few among her former friends. She walked down and took her stand on the lower level without hesitation, and remained on it firmly. If timid or awkward social advances were made to her by some old intimates who feared she would think them mean if they did not make them, she made it clear that the present relations between them must be entirely uninfluenced by the past. Old Lady Halford had an

example of this put before her early in Mrs. Grove's professional career.

"I should like to ask you to come and do something at one of my evenings, but knowing you as I have done, it couldn't be managed, I fear, Mrs. Grove." Sir Lionel's mother said this when she met Mrs. Grove by accident.

"Forget that you ever have known me, and I'll do the same. Offer me the same terms and the same treatment you would offer to a stranger, and as a stranger I'll come gladly," Mrs. Grove replied.

Accordingly Lady Halford, with a spice of humor, strongly dashed with malice, did secure the services of that accomplished elocutionist and reciter, Mrs. Grove, for one of her crowded evenings, at which, among other people, were present Mr. and Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden.

To Violet there was neither mortification, shame nor annoyance in this *rencontre*. She was proud of her mother, and of her mother's talent, and glad as a child to see others acknowledge it. As soon as the recitation was over she made her way with feverish haste to her mother's side, while her husband beat his brows at her in his usual forcible style from the other side of the room. For to Phillipps-Twysden there was annoyance of a peculiarly bitter kind in meeting Mrs. Grove in one of her old haunts even under changed circumstances, and in seeing his wife defy his order, not to recognise her mother, to his face.

So he glared at her and did not approach her, and when someone, not knowing the relationship between them, spoke to him of Mrs. Grove, he descended to the depths, and uttered the following bit of baseness :

"Clever! Hardly clever, but confoundedly audacious. She was in society once, I believe, but she's a woman I won't let my wife know."

The man to whom he said this was a well-known gossip and imaginative retailer of scandal. He did not know Mr. Phillipps-Twysden, but thanked him for the words, which were as widely whispered about as even he could desire.

"You see, I'm not the only fellow who won't allow his wife to have anything to do with that mother of yours," he said to Violet one night at dinner, repeating his own heavily-trimmed remark to her as if he had not been the one to say the destructive words and set the damning ball rolling.

Then Violet told him what a far better woman she herself would have been that day if she had never had aught to do with anyone save that dear mother of hers, "who saw through you from the first," she added.

So in this way their lives had gone on for five years.

CHAPTER V.

AN OLD STORY RETOLD.

It must not be imagined that Sir Lionel Halford had been away bear-hunting all these five years. He had stayed away for two years according to his original intention, working hard and travelling and hunting, and trying very manfully to take an interest in all those fellow-creatures who would be bettered by such an interest being taken in them. But all the time the pain which pricked him sharply when he heard of Violet's marriage continued to smart and hurt him. It was characteristic of him that he never indulged in even the most transient feeling of hatred or desire for vengeance against Phillipps-Twysden, the man who bad supplanted him. On the contrary, he prayed very heartily that Phillipps-Twysden might turn out "a good fellow in every way for her sake."

There was no unworthy, mean and suspicious act in the thought that flashed into Sir Lionel's mind when he heard of the marriage, still he felt sorry and a little disturbed by it. It was this. That though he had seen a great deal of

Phillipps-Twysden during the last twelve or eighteen months, he really knew nothing about him beyond the fact of his being a gentlemanly, clever fellow, with plenty of money, and a partnership in a prosperous business-house in the city. Of Phillipps-Twysden's own people Sir Lionel knew as little as Violet Grove did when she married him.

However, he subdued the uncomfortable feeling of disquietude and uncertainty by manfully attributing it to jealousy on his own part, and wrote a hearty letter of congratulation to the lucky man. Then he disciplined himself according to his lights, and though he neither forgot Violet nor tried to forget her, he abstained as resolutely from indulging in maudlin regret, as he did from the luxury of giving way to the sentiments of envy, hatred, and malice against her husband.

At the expiration of two years he had come back to find Lady Susan Meadows still unmarried, still unemotionally happy to see him and to be friendly with him, and still perfectly powerless to efface the image of Violet from his heart in imagination or wherever it was imprinted. And Lady Susan had been quite affably contented that it should be so, though his mother had told Lady Susan more than once that Lal's one fault was a faint heart where the woman he most admired was concerned.

"Perhaps after being hugged by a bear, he won't feel shy of a woman he admires," Lady Susan had said with her most meaningless smile. She was not a lymphatic fool by any means, but when she felt herself being beguiled into showing her hand by the mother of a man who had refrained from showing his as yet, she could be very lymphatic and impenetrable indeed.

After this Lady Halford had said no more to Lady Susan, but she had a cosy chat or two with the duchess on the subject. The duchess was an affectionate, but not a blindly-partial mother, and she knew that if Susan had not been a duke's daughter, her mental and moral charms would

probably have been overlooked in this matrimonial market altogether. Therefore she inclined a kindly ear to all the hints Lady Halford threw out respecting Lionel's deep but unspoken feelings towards Lady Susan.

The Duchess of Meadshire was a pretty blooming girl when his Grace had married her nearly forty years before. Now she was a shapeless old lady, whose fat was so unmanageable that when she sank down upon a chair or sofa it looked as if she had been spilt there.

"It's fortunate that Susan doesn't take after me," she said in the course of one of these conversations with Lady Halford. "Sir Lionel is short and stout himself; it would have been the height of imprudence on his part to have wanted to marry a plump girl. Now Susan is tall and distinctly thin——"

"Thin and graceful," Lady Halford interrupted.

"No, no! there's no blinding oneself to the truth when it's so apparent as this truth is whenever Susan wears a low dress. She is *very* thin, bony in fact. But never mind. If she had been a beauty she would have been married to someone else long ago, and Sir Lionel would never have had a chance. Now, in ten or twelve years she'll be just as good to look at as if she had been a beauty in her youth. So it's all for the best. Look at me! Forty years ago I was called the Queen of Rosebuds! Look at me now!"

Lady Halford looked at her, had nothing appropriate and pleasant to say about her, and so judiciously rounded the conversation off towards her son.

"Lionel will be home by the middle of August. He wants me to have a house-party at Halford for the first—"

She paused, leaving her sentence unfinished, and the duchess filled up the space.

"And you want us to be there, I suppose. Now, my dear, that's quite impossible for two reasons. The first is: Susan won't go unless Sir Lionel downright asks her; and

the second is that we're full up at Meadow's Court till we go abroad in the middle of October. If Sir Lionel wants to see Susan he must come to us at Meadow's Court."

So when the invitation came he went to Meadow's Court, in Somersetshire, his mother having judiciously left unrepeated that remark of the duchess as to his going being indicative of a desire to see Lady Susan.

And while he was there he was reminded vividly of Violet again, for at Houndell, a neighboring place, there lived an eccentric old bachelor friend of the duke's called Twysden.

"Papa likes him because they were boys and young men together, and mamma likes him because he always keeps papa interested and happy when we're down here," Lady Susan explained to Sir Lionel. "And I like him," she added, "because he is as kind and good and charitable to everyone as if he hadn't keen tricked and deceived and made very miserable by those he trusted in his youth."

"What's his story?" Sir Lionel asked.

The two young people were leaning over a low iron gate that led out of the lawn at Meadow's Court into a long, straight walk, bordered by high hedges of clipt beech that were glowing ruddily in their autumn clothes. Along this path the two old gentlemen were strolling arm in arm.

"A common-place story enough, as far as the love part goes, but with some uncommon treachery in it. He was engaged to a great beauty once, and the wedding-day was fixed. Among other people who came to stay with him to be at it was his sister's lover, a man called Phillipps. This man was very brilliant and attractive, but he must have been a worthless scamp, for before the wedding-day came he had got the bride-elect to elope with him. He left a heartless letter for poor Miss Laura Twysden, telling her that she would live to bless him for the action which saved both her brother and herself from marrying people who didn't care for them. And that was all the apology or excuse he offered. Wasn't he a wretch?"

"What became of them?" Sir Lionel asked. "Phillipps? I know a Phillipps-Twysden."

"Do you? Well, I hope you know some good of him, for he is the son of the precious pair I've been telling you about," Lady Susan answered. "It's a story that is brimming over with ingratitude and treachery on the one side, and generosity and goodness on the other. Mr. Phillipps and his wife soon spent what means they might have had when they married, and directly poverty stepped in the man showed himself in his true colors. He grew morose and cruelly harsh and tyrannical to his wife, and she being high-spirited stood up at him and gave back his hard words and surly sneers with interest. They soon came to hate one another heartily, and at last he left her, and—where do you think she came to ask for help for herself and her little son?"

"To the man who had loved her, I suppose," said Sir Lionel simply.

"She did—but how she could bring herself to do it, how she could bring herself to face Mr. and Miss Twysden and ask them for help, I can't imagine. But she did it, and those two blessed people treated her as a sister, gave her a nice little house near them, and a comfortable income; and between them adopted her boy. They heaped coals of fire on her head, and when she died Mr. Twysden changed into quite an old man in a day, I've heard mamma say. There was love if you like. Now tell me what you know about the son?"

Then Sir Lionel told what he knew, going resolutely through the whole story of Phillipps-Twysden's meeting and marriage with Violet Grove.

When he had finished Lady Susan lifted herself up from the gate on which she had been leaning, and holding out the hand that was nearest to him said warmly:

"I understand! You would do for Violet what Mr. Twysden did for the woman he had really loved, if Violet

ever needed it. I quite understand; and, Sir Lionel, I never liked you so much in my life as I do at this moment, and—I *am* so sorry for you."

That he was grateful to her for her sympathy was evident from the way he took and pressed the kind, true, honest, womanly hand held out to him. Yet he had said no words relative to his love for Violet, or of the hopes he had entertained of winning her before he had been misguided enough to introduce his own familiar friend to her. But though he had not spoken of his own love and hopes, and had simply narrated how quickly Phillipps-Twysden had won his wife, Lady Susan was discerning enough to read between the lines, and, as she told him, what she read there made her like him better than ever.

"Yes," he said in answer to her remarks, "I would do all that a brother could do for Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden if she ever wanted aid, but that's a very unlikely and remote contingency. The son is not like the father, he adores his wife, and they are very happy together, I hear. Besides, you must remember that Violet didn't deal treacherously with any man, or jilt him. She was as free as air to choose when she chose Phillipps-Twysden."

He spoke gravely and earnestly in his defence of Violet, and Lady Susan's face glowed with the warmth of cordial feeling which was evoked in her by his generous unselfishness. As they walked back towards the house, anyone seeing them might well have fancied they were lovers, for he was speaking very earnestly, and she was turning her head towards and listening to him with wrapt interest. But at the same time she was thinking—

"You good mammas on both sides are destined to be disappointed! History is repeating itself. What those saints, Mr. Twysden and his sister, were to Mrs. Phillipps and her son, Sir Lionel will be to that son's wife—her loyal knight and true, whether she ever wants him or not."

"Where were you all the morning, Susan?" the duchess

asked her daughter as they were trundling along behind the fat little cobs that did duty in a very low pony carriage when the duchess was bent on a neighborly calling round. She drove them herself, accompanied almost invariably by her daughter; and the two ladies delighted in dispensing with all constraining state or attendance on these occasions; relying, as humbler people are compelled to do, on finding odd boys to hold their horses at the houses of those friends whom they found at home.

"Where were you? I wanted you to look over the list of the lot who come when these go," the duchess went on speaking of her coming and present guests. "I'm so apt to forget whether I've got together those who hate or those who love one another till I am reminded. I sent for you, and was told you had gone out with the Duke and Sir Lionel."

"Even so I had," Lady Susan assented smilingly; "then papa met Mr. Twysden, and, as usual, finding him all-sufficient, Sir Lionel and I were left to ourselves, and very much we enjoyed ourselves in the sun at the end of the beech-hedge walk for an hour."

"He's one of the nicest men I know, Susan, and I mean to be fonder of him than of all my other sons-in-law put together."

"That's very good of you, mamma; I'm very fond of him already. I think he's the best man I know, except Mr. Twysden."

"What do you mean?" the duchess asked, pulling herself rather more into shape in order to gain a better view of her daughter's face.

"Well, you know the story of the way that grand chivalric old saint, Mr. Twysden, returned good for evil, for you told it to me yourself!"

"Yes, yes, but what has that to do——"

"With Sir Lionel? Listen, mamma, and you'll like Sir Lionel *almost* as much as I do. The son of the man and

woman who condemned Mr. Twysden to lead a wifeless life, has done the same thing for Sir Lionel, and he, the generous, darling fellow, will keep himself free to help and serve her if she ever needs help or service, just as papa's old friend did."

"Did he tell this to *you?*" the duchess asked, aghast.

"He told me something, and I guessed out the rest."

"Has he said he doesn't mean to marry?"

"Oh, dear no! but if he ever marries he will cease to be my ideal knight, and I shan't be half so fond of him. I've made up my mind that he is to be prosaically comfortable with some nice young woman."

"Does this mean that you're such a sentimental noodle that you won't marry him because you're not his first love?" the duchess asked angrily. Lady Susan laughed at the accusation as she answered:

"It means that he'll never ask me or any other woman to marry him, if Mr. Phillipps-Twysden out-lives him."

"Oh, dear! I must go to Houndell and have a chat with Laura Twysden about it all. To think that horrid young man whom they adopted should have crossed *our* paths. I mean Sir Lionel's. Laura will be shocked, and *so* sorry for you, Susan, I'm sure."

"I don't come into the story," Lady Susan said good-temperedly.

The duchess thought it no matter for mirth, and replied, rather angrily:

"You would have been the heroine of the story, Susan, if it had not been for that other woman—that Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden."

"Don't blame her. As far as I am concerned she did her best for me by removing herself from Sir Lionel's path."

Lady Susan spoke with imperturbable good-humor, but there was a little pain behind the effort at composure. She was quite satisfied to remain Lady Susan Meadows.

At the same time she would have been well pleased, now she knew him better, to have been the heroine of Sir Lionel's love-story.

CHAPTER VI.

"GOOD-BYE!"

WHEN the Phillipps-Twysdens were first married they lived in a house in Westbourne Terrace, but after about three years Mr. Phillipps-Twysden had conceived a violent distaste to the neighborhood, and declared in favor of a house in the country about an hour from town.

At first Violet had been strongly opposed to the house. She had got fond of the house that had been her first married home, and in which she had been happy while the glamor of her love for her husband lasted. She had "cultivated" each room with care and thought, and taste and money, and had grown attached to them. Moreover, her boy had been born there, and the birth-place of an only son must always be dear to his mother.

Additionally she had many dear friends in the region around, and it seemed a purposeless and wilful thing to do to cut themselves off from this circle and go away into a country place where they might possibly be weighed and measured and found wanting by the residents for many a long month.

If she had still loved her husband "desperately" as she had done when she married him, or even had she retained any of the warm, tender, brave affection she had cherished for him in spite of many things after the "desperate love" died, it would have been different. There would then have been no hardship or difficulty in going into a dull district, or, for the matter of that, into the veriest solitude he could have suggested. But as it was—well! as it was,

there was no compensation in her domestic life for the social consolations she relinquished in leaving Westbourne Terrace.

In the early days of her marriage Violet had forced herself to be a very forgiving woman, because she still loved him and still believed in his love for her. She had forced herself to look at his conduct towards her mother with stern justice and impartiality, and she had forced herself to admit that her mother had been the first to proclaim war. But other yokes had been laid upon her, and she was now at the end of five years beginning to feel that she would not bend her neck to them meekly any longer.

When first she permitted herself to feel that he was "cruel," she nearly broke her heart over her own "weakness and disloyalty," as she regarded it for the moment. For how could she call him "cruel?" He had neither starved, deserted, nor knocked her down, and it was for taking one or other of these extreme measures that husbands get into the police reports. But still after a time it came to her in cold blood to feel that though he provided her with the means of having what lodging-house people call a "liberal table"—though he stayed with her, and never struck her—he was nevertheless "cruel!"

For he was weary of her, and he showed his weariness in a dozen little ways that cannot be defined and written down. If she was ailing, he would order a big fire in her bedroom if the weather was cold, and direct the cook to supply her mistress with plenty of beef-tea. And he would be put out and annoyed because she could not preside at his table and superintend the comfortable arrangements of the house. And there it ended!

Without ever saying anything definitely unkind or unjust in words that she could have taken hold of clearly and resented or disputed, he still continually goaded and stung her. He would fix his cold deep grey eyes on her, and find fault with some trifling omission or action in steady,

level tones that betrayed neither passion nor irritation, and that fell upon her heart with the fatal effect of the proverbial drops of water on the hardest stone. As a rule, her reason told her he was reasonable in his reproofs and condemnations. But her heart ached and rebelled against them, and she had none to turn to for comfort. For she was too proud and too true a woman to let the truth escape her to even acquaintances and friends—the truth, the sad subduing truth, that her husband was tired of her.

And with all he was so high above suspicion, so far above reproach in the eyes of all men. Regular and steady in his devotion to business, prompt in his payments, an example of Sunday church-going, a contributor to all parochial and local charities, liberal in all his household arrangements, fond of his little son Jack, and desirous always that his wife should be well-dressed, and that everything about her carriage and horses should be admirably appointed and perfect of their kind.

What more could any reasonable woman want?

Sympathy and affection and consideration! These were the things Violet craved for, and these were just what Mr. Phillipps-Twysden withheld from her.

He had long ceased to kiss her when he left the house in the morning or came back to it at night; and though her heart had bled, and she had cried her eyes into a state of inflammation about the omission at first, she had now grown callous to it. But when he went away for a three weeks' stay in Manchester in order to organise a recently started business there, with a mere cool "Good-bye, Violet, take care of the boy, and wire if there's anything the matter with him," she was nearly stunned.

She stood perfectly silent and motionless just inside the large French window of the dining-room, and he came in and out several times to pick up cigar cases, newspapers, and such things, talking all the time to his son or giving

directions to his servants. The double dog-cart with its pair of handsome brown horses was at the door, and she recalled with a sharp throb of pain, the feeling of passionate pride and pleasure which had filled her heart the first time she had seen him driving those horses to her father's door when he came wooing her. That was only five years ago! and how he seemed to love her then! Was the change in him accounted for by any change in herself!—had she grown unsightly?

She turned round sharply to look in a glass, and her sad eyes met their own reflection for a moment only, for she saw her husband standing there still.

"I just came back to say that if you like to have anyone stay with you while I'm away you can, you know, Violet——"

"Thanks, there is no one."

"Why not ask your mother, if she can give up stumping the country for the sake of her daughter for once."

"She would do anything for the sake of her daughter—except come into your house," she said with an angry sob. Then she recovered herself, and added,

"But thank you for thinking of providing for my amusement. I shall not be dull—that is, not duller than usual. I shall have Jack."

He fidgeted about in a way that was most unusual with him for a few moments, then, as he was lighting his cigar, he said:

"I met two old friends yesterday. Halford and Noel. Noel's staying somewhere down in the West. He wants me to go and stay with him, so when I've done Manchester, if I don't come home you needn't be surprised. I haven't seen Dick Noel for ten years."

She heard without grasping the meaning of his words, for her memory had gone back to the day when she made her choice between Sir Lionel Halford and this man who was now her husband.

"I suppose Sir Lionel won't call on me?" she said softly.

"Hardly, I should think. I certainly didn't invite him to do so. Well, I'm off; good-bye."

He held his cheek down sideways for her to kiss if she felt disposed, and she held her head up higher and stood back apace.

"Good-bye, John. I hope you will enjoy yourself," she said quietly; and he looked at her and laughed—actually laughed—as he said:

"So, the 'gentle tassel' isn't going to be whistled back! Well, Violet, I certainly won't trouble you with any more of my endearments since you refuse me a little kiss when I'm going away for several weeks." Then he went out singing as he went:

"If she be not kind to me,
What care I how fair she be."

When he drove away Violet faced herself in the glass, and this is what she saw.

A charming graceful figure, an oval, clear-skinned face, with delicate mobile little features, and sweet eyes of rare hazel grey that looked black in some lights, and blue in others, and a handsome little head round which the dark silky hair was closely dressed.

"I have *not* grown ugly!" she thought; "there is more in my face, more power, more thought, more prettiness than there was when he married me, and there would be more love too if he would have it. The change is not in me. What is the change in him? Why has he tired of me? Is there some other woman?"

When she asked that question, or rather when she suffered that question to be wrung out of her heart, she knew that her assumed indifference, her enforced quiet endurance of his cold duty-treatment of her was all a sham. She loved him still, she would love him better, more

staunchly than ever, if "only there is no other woman, if only little as he cares for me he cares for no one else," she sobbed as she turned away from the contemplation of her anxious sweet face. Then she reproached herself for daring to suspect him, and sent for her little Jack to bear her company in a drive.

It was a beautiful home, set in the midst of mosaic-like gardens, which were bordered by pine woods on the north and east, and the beauty of it was very apparent to her this morning, for it was June and the roses were in bloom.

"How happy John and I ought to be!" she thought as her carriage wheels rolled swiftly down the drive and away over the common towards Weybridge, where she meant to take a boat and give Jack and herself a blow on the river. "How happy we ought to be. We have youth and health and wealth—and such a darling child! Oh! my boy! with you well and strong and happy and provided for, how can I be a miserable woman?"

Nevertheless, as she took her seat in a boat down by the ferry with little Jack on her lap, she was a miserable woman, for she could not forget the manner of her parting with her husband, nor could she cast from her mind that suspicion of there being another woman in the casewhich had flashed across it this morning.

They had hardly gone fifty yards before Jack found boating monotonous and wanted to fish, as he saw the occupants of other boats doing. Fishing tackle not being in the bargain when the boat was hired, Violet had to improvise some out of her parasol handle, pocket-handkerchief, something unattractive both in color and appearance which the boatman produced from his pocket. However, Jack was not only satisfied but delighted, so they stayed in mid-stream for a couple of hours, during which Jack caught nothing assiduously, and his mother dreamed a long, sad, waking dream, from which she was awakened at last by the flashing of oars, the sound of bright voices, and

the sight of a big boat full of people passing close to her, among whom she recognised Sir Lionel Halford and his mother. She had not seen the former since her marriage; but Lady Halford she met now and again in society. Accordingly the passing boat was checked and greetings were exchanged, and Sir Lionel tried his best to be quite easy and natural.

"I saw Noel and your husband yesterday, Mrs. Twysden. Noel wants me to join them——"

"At Manchester?" Violet interrupted in her surprise.

"At Manchester! No, not a bit of it, but at Plymouth. I suppose you go down for the ball?"

"What ball?"

"Really, Lal," his mother put in, "we're blocking the way while you're gossiping. My dear Mrs. Twysden, I haven't half forgiven you yet for having left town. I can't tell you how we all miss you. Lal, I shall have a fit unless you move on; there are three boats bearing down on us. Good-bye! so that's your sweet boy? By-by, darling, take care of mamma. Good-bye, Mrs. Twysden."

Lady Halford's boat shot on, and a lady who was sitting by her bent forward and whispered to Sir Lionel:

"She is the 'Violet' of whom you told me three years ago, Sir Lionel."

He assented with a slight, grave smile.

"Sweet little boy, that of the Phillipps-Twysden's," Lady Halford put in fussily, "and how well she looks. Have you seen her till now since her marriage, Lal?"

"I have not," he said curtly.

"Can't you introduce me?" Lady Susan asked. "I would rather know her than any other woman I've ever seen in my life."

"She *is* interesting!" Lady Halford said drily; "at least she would be if she were not quite so much wrapped up in her husband. He is a very delightful person, I admit, but still not all the world to everyone else as he is

to his wife. It was quite a love-match theirs—one of the rare ones that turn out so well. You may remember something about it, Lal. They met and were infatuated with one another at first sight, and married, and are entirely happy and absorbed in one another. Quite a model pair, I call them."

Lady Halford ceased speaking, and Lady Susan Meadows roused herself from a reverie with a little start.

"Thanks for gratifying my curiosity about the pretty woman so exhaustively, Lady Halford," she said. "I happen to know some friends of Mr. Twysden's in Somersetshire. But he never brings his wife there, and they have an idea that she is something very different to the reality. I shall be glad to know her myself, and help the Houndell peple to know her better," she added, bending forward suddenly and addressing Sir Lionel; but Lady Halford's quick old ears caught the words.

"Perhaps, however well her husband's people know and like her, they may not care to be much mixed up with her *mother*," she whispered mysteriously; "a curious kind of person, my dear Susan; clever I've no doubt; and showy, and oh! so self-confident and 'courageous,' as some people call it! But terrible—simply *terrible* as a mother-in-law to a man who shrinks from being the observed of the many, as Phillipps-Twysden does."

CHAPTER VII.

FLO AT HOME.

When Mr. Phillipps-Twysden spoke of having met his "old friend, Noel," as if he had met him that day for the first time for ten years, he spoke wide of the truth. He had seen Dick Noel many times in the course of the last ten

days or a fortnight. He had dined, lunched, and gone to theatres, clubs, and other places with him; had, in fact, resumed almost in its integrity the old bachelor intimacy. But, notwithstanding this, he had kept two important points concerning himself concealed from the gay, thoughtless, thoroughly honorable soldier. The one was the comparatively unimportant fact of his having taken unto himself the name of "Twysden" in addition to that of "Phillipps." The other was that he had married a wife!

With both these facts in the background he went to Manchester, as he had told his wife he should; but instead of remaining there for some weeks on business, as he had implied he might be compelled to do, he stayed for two days only, and then made his way to Plymouth, where Major Noel had settled down to spend his two years' leave.

It had been arranged between the two men, when they parted in London, that Phillipps should go to a fancy dress ball, for which Major Noel had already received an invitation, which was to be given at a rather rollicking country-house near Plymouth. In view of this, Phillipps brought with him an admirable *Faust* costume, for a rumor had reached him that one of the prettiest girls in the neighborhood would appear as *Marguerite.*

For some reason or other the name of this girl, Florence Arle, sounded pleasantly in his ears, and out of the idlest curiosity he made a few enquiries about her from Major Noel. The latter could tell him only that she was "as pretty a girl as he had ever seen; but, unluckily for me," he added, "she has no tin, so I must leave her to fall to the share of some such rich fellow as yourself, Phillipps."

"I'm out of the betting," Phillipps-Twysden had replied, and for a moment or two he hesitated as to whether or not he should tell Noel he was already married. Finally he

decided that he snould keep the fact of his marriage dark! —at any rate until he as *Faust* had made the acquaintance of Florence Arle as *Marguerite*. After that event circumstances would guide him and determine how much or how little he should say about Violet, his wife, to his new acquaintances in the West.

It must be understood that for some incomprehensible and occult reason Phillipps-Twysden went to this fancy dress ball predisposed to be interested in this girl, Florence Arle. Beyond her name which sounded with unaccountable lingering sweetness in his ears, and the report of her beauty, he knew absolutely nothing about her.

His secrecy concerning his wife and child had, hitherto, been motiveless, merely the outcome of his habitual reserve about his own private affairs. But from the moment of his being introduced to a *Marguerite* as fair as she who inspired Goëthe's imagination, a motive as fierce, relentless, and deadly as ever actuated the conduct of a *Faust*, took possession of him, and made him resolve, with selfishly savage force, that Florence Arle should never know of "Violet's claim upon him." That was the way he worded it himself—"Violet's claim upon him." The legal claim which his wife had upon him was the sole tie that bound him to her now, and even that might be broken or slipped through by cleverness and tact, he thought, as his steady burning unflinching eyes followed the unfortunate *Marguerite*, whose uncommon beauty had caught his fiery fancy to her own detriment.

It *was* uncommon beauty! For once the charms of a local belle had not been overstated. Her metallic-looking gold-colored hair, her starry green-grey eyes, the satin-like texture of her skin, and the splendid grace of her slim, perfectly-proportioned figure, were all above criticism. But her manner and expression were more attractive even than her looks to a man who, like Phillipps-Twysden, had been accustomed either to conventionally good or ordina-

rily bad women all his life. Florence Arle had until the last two months of her life been her own sole guide, philosopher, and friend. And the result of her self-education was somewhat extraordinary, and as difficult to deal with as to describe.

For instance, her manner was as free, careless, "unbounded," one might almost say, as were the manners of the colts among whom she had been brought up. But her morals were as precise as a Puritan's and as pure as an angel's. She had kicked over the traces many a time, in appearance, so her detractors—and they were many—said. But no one dared to whisper a word against the honor and goodness, the modesty and integrity of the girl, who followed the hounds alone because she had neither father, brother, nor groom to accompany her, in order that she might "show off" and sell the young horses by the careful production and training and successful sale of which her father and mother lived.

A glance at the Arle household on the morning after the fancy dress ball at which Florence had seen and been seen by Phillipps-Twysden may help to a clearer insight into her character.

The house, known simply as Eastmoor, stands—or stood—between the Cornwood and Plympton districts. The road to it was a rough one, leading over the bed of a river between two rocky banks to a hill-side path, at the top of which stood the house, encircled by a yard. Along three sides of this yard were stables. The fourth side opened upon a good tan-run, across which hurdles were often put up at intervals, for here Florence Arle trained the colts she rode to sell.

On this special morning she stood ready habited, waiting for her mount, at a side door at the end of a long passage. Another door hard by was open, showing a glimpse of a comfortable "domestic interior." A well spread breakfast table stood in the middle of a bright little room, hung

round with a number of charmingly executed water-color sketches of Italian and Swiss scenery. And at this table a delicate-looking woman presided over coffee-pot and cream-jug, and a partially paralysed man made a slow and difficult progress through the various dainty dishes.

The pair were Mr. and Mrs. Arle—Florence's father and mother. He had been an artist, and a fairly successful one, until this grievous affliction befel him. The exigencies of his long serious illness strained their resources terribly, and after that partial recovery, which left him quick to see, feel, and imagine as ever, but powerless to execute, there seemed to be nothing but gripping poverty and sordid want before the stricken artist and his pretty wife and child.

But when things were at their darkest the clouds began to lift. A brother of Mrs. Arle's, who had kept aloof from the "painter" in the latter's prosperous days, ranged up alongside of his sister in her hour of distress, and offered the whole family a home with him at Eastmoor. The little property was his own, and he lived on it, and he lived well, for he was the owner of a fine breed of horses, and was noted also for his skill and prowess in breaking them in.

The prospect of living an isolated, horsey life on a remote horse-breeding farm on the borders of Dartmoor, did not commend itself to either Mr. or Mrs. Arle. In fact, they hesitated, and so nearly offended Mr. Joseph Cadly out of all desire to help them. But Florence, a little girl of 12, was enchanted at the idea, and her genuine gratitude and pleasure soothed her uncle into a lenient mood, when his brother-in-law and sister, finding they could do no better, accepted his bounty.

They had been at Eastmoor ever since Florence was 12, and she was 23 when she, to her misfortune, went to the fancy dress ball. Practically she was the mistress of the establishment, for though her mother kept the keys and ordered the stores and the dinners, it was always

"Flo's wishes" that were consulted, and "Flo's will" that regulated the routine of the household ways.

"Old Joe Cadly," as everyone had called him for the last twenty years, was a man of upwards of seventy now. His eye for a likely colt, his seat in the saddle, and his ability in driving a bargain were as good as ever. But his business would long ago have gone to pieces had it not been for his niece and idol, Florence. His seat and his hands were admirable, so was his pluck, but one of the curses of the changeable Devonshire climate—rheumatism—had claimed him for its own, and it was only in the earliest autumn and latest spring hunting days that he could follow the hounds. Fortunately his famous riding mantle had fallen on the shoulders of his pretty niece, and so for the common weal it had come to pass that from the time Florence was about fifteen it became her duty to ride the Eastmoor colts to hounds as they came on for sale.

The pursuits of her calling had neither roughened, vulgarised, nor made her unfeminine. Instinctively everyone recognised that the well-known old horse-breeder and trainer's niece was a gentlewoman, and then when her poor afflicted high-bred artist father's sad story was told, people declared her conduct to be "heroic," and an impulsive few invited her to dances. The majority of those who did this had no marriageable sons, and so were disposed to laugh at the cautious mothers who hinted that "Charming as Florence Arle and her parents were, Eastmoor was not quite such a good training ground for a girl as for a colt."

It had been at the house of one of the most daring of these injudicious ones that the fancy ball had taken place. The mistress of the house had a warm hunting heart beating in her matronly bosom, and the "cleverest little horse in the world" was hers by Florence Arle's advice. Mrs. Broadhurst was wealthy, and old enough to follow her own whims without consulting anyone, and it was her pleasure

to give the girl whose career was so incongruous with her manner and appearance all the pleasure she could. Accordingly she procured a perfect *Marguerite* costume for her pet, and invited her—to meet Phillipps-Twysden! or Mr. Phillipps as he was called now, for in Devonshire the "Twysden" was released from the "tone" giving duty it had to perform in London Society.

Presently the young horse, which was in process of being gentled by Florence, was led round to the side-door by a stable-lad, and her uncle's voice calling her at the same time to "hurry up, my girl," she went out, followed by her mother.

"I suppose you'll be back to dinner at two, as usual, Flo?" the latter asked, as she watched with pride the rapid series of graceful movements with which her daughter settled to her saddle and her work.

"What a goose I am, mother, not to have told you. I am to lunch with Mrs. Broadhurst at two, and show 'Larkspur' over some hurdles to some friends of hers. I think I shall come home on some other man's property, Uncle Joe, for my *Faust* wants a perfect one, and he needn't look beyond 'Larkspur' for what he wants."

"Major Noel will think twice before he forks out a hundred and fifty," Uncle Joe was growling, half-pityingly, half-contemptuously, in reply, when Florence interrupted—

"Major Noel wasn't my *Faust* at all. *Faust* was a Mr. Phillipps, some commonplace London business man, I believe. I was rather disappointed when I saw him first, but afterwards I liked him, he knew more about the play than anyone else I spoke to. Tell father if *Faust* comes here to look at 'Larkspur,' he must exert himself to be pleasant and talk. Now, Jim, I'm ready, let go." And "Larkspur's" head being released the girl rode off as she had ridden a hundred times before, to show a likely hunter to a possible purchaser.

But never to come back the same carelessly happy,

contented, unscheming creature who had spoken with such unfeigning accuracy of Mr. Phillipps as "her *Faust*."

"A blessing Mrs. Broadhurst is to our dear girl," Mrs. Arle said to her husband with a sigh of contentment as she re-entered the breakfast-room. "Flo meets such nice people there. I shouldn't wonder if she makes a good *quiet* marriage after all. It's always been my fear that she might marry someone who's horsey, and horsey only, like poor Joe; but I find there are always a set of men who don't hunt, as well as a set of men who do, about Mrs. Broadhurst's."

"And we generally know pretty much about the men who do hunt down here, and less than little about those who don't," Uncle Joe remarked as he hobbled forward; for the wind had changed, and his rheumatism was revenging itself upon him for the climate's caprices. "It's no use, Fanny," he went on, "Flo will saddle her own horse, and never choose a bad 'un. My trouble is that the more she goes out among the gentry—her own class," he added quickly, as he saw his sister flush with angry pride, "the sooner I shall lose the sweetest pair of hands that ever taught a colt to look through a bridle."

"Well, well, Joe!" Mrs. Arle said, forgivingly and encouragingly, "we needn't trouble ourselves yet. Flo hasn't got a thought of any man besides her father and you in her head yet—"

"Then long may her father and I reign," Uncle Joe prayed fervently, as he went away to his little office, which commanded every inch of the stable-yard through a window whose crystal brightness revealed every speck of dust on the coats of the groomed ones as they were paraded round before being exercised in the tan run, and somehow or other he found himself wishing more fervently than he had ever wished before that "Flo was a boy! not only because she'd follow me here more seemingly when I'm gone, but because she'd be spared some trouble, poor lass! some trouble!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. CADLY ON CONJUGAL DUTIES.

MRS. BROADHURST was a determined woman with a hooked nose and a high spirit, as void of vanity as she was of discretion. The intimacy which was that day commenced at her luncheon-table and afterwards cemented over some hurdles on her lawn between Florence and Mr. Phillipps, was well sustained under her fostering care. The good-looking, clever, attractive London man of "some business or other," who was vaguely reputed to be enormously wealthy, and the pretty penniless daughter of the paralysed artist were incessantly invited, in season and out of season, to meet each other at the Broadhursts. The man went only too readily. So, alas! did the girl!

Once, when the matter had grown beyond her control through Mr. Phillipps having gained the right of entrance to Eastmoor itself, it did occur to Mrs. Broadhurst to make a few prudent enquiries concerning him. But, unluckily, she made them of Major Noel, whose confidence in and enthusiasm for his friend far exceeded either his knowledge or grasp of the subject.

"Your friend Mr. Phillipps seems seriously smitten with Flo, doesn't he? I suppose there is no doubt about his being as desirable as he seems?" she asked, and the Major loyally replied. "He's one of the best fellows in the world, take my word for it. I adore Miss Arle myself, and think she's a lucky girl to have got such a fellow as Phillipps."

"She has got him, then? He does mean to marry her?" Mrs. Broadhurst asked a little anxiously; and Noel assured her that "he knew Phillipps through and

through, that there was no humbug about him," and that "Florence Arle was a deuced lucky girl."

"Have you known him long?" Mrs. Broadhurst persisted. "He seems to be a little bit secretive. I never hear him speak of his own people."

"I've known him intimately for more than fifteen years," Major Noel said warmly, "and it never occurred to me to question why he never spoke of his people any more than it occurred to him to question why I never spoke of mine. I have none left, my dear lady! do you mistrust *me* in consequence? Phillipps is similarly situated, probably. But I'll ask him, if you please."

"Not for worlds," she cried, throwing up her hands. "Only Flo's father is helpless, her mother is a kind-hearted nonentity, and her uncle is—old Joe Cadly! I feel responsible for having helped on this affair, and if it turns out happily for Flo I shall take great credit to myself. She's a dear child! I wish you had been the man! and hope he won't take her away from me altogether," the impulsive lady added abruptly.

"He's awfully diffident, for Phillipps, about his chances of success, I can tell you, if that's any comfort to you, Mrs. Broadhurst; he doesn't assume the conquering hero airs by any means. Day after day he drives off asking her for fear he should lose her altogether, he says. It's an awful compliment to any girl, I think, that Phillipps should doubt his chances with her."

"He must be finessing if he says he is," Mrs. Broadhurst said angrily. "Oh! don't protest, I tell you he must be humbugging if he pretends to be doubtful about Flo. Why she wears her heart upon her sleeve for him to peck at. I told her of it, and scolded her about it, and all she said was:

"He and I both know it. Why shouldn't I show other people that I love him?" That was six weeks ago, and he hasn't asked her to marry him yet. I can tell you I got

very sour looks from old Joe Cadly, yesterday, when I rode over to Eastmoor. I pity the man who plays the fool with Flo while her uncle is alive, he'll get short shrift."

Major Noel went back to his lodgings in Stoke, feeling rather weary in his mind after this conversation with Mrs. Broadhurst. He had implicit confidence in the honor and integrity of his friend, but he could not help admitting to himself that Phillipps' conduct during the last week or ten days had been open to misconstruction. That the passionate ardor of his admiration of Florence Arle was unabated was evident. But he winced at the word "marriage," and looked gloomy and depressed when Noel reminded him that he had no one to please but himself.

It was guest night with one of the regiments, and the two men dined at mess, and so had no private conversation together till they were strolling towards Stoke in the early hours of the morning. Then Major Noel mentioned that he had seen Mrs. Broadhurst, and a few seconds later on laid that lady's fears and opinions before his friend.

"You see there's no longer any doubt about Miss Arle's feeling for you, old fellow, it only remains for you to—what do you mean to do?"

He had not intended to finish his sentence in this way when he began it, but a smothered exclamation that sounded very much like the reverse of a benediction on Mrs. Broadhurst's interfering head had precipitated matters.

"I intend to clear out of the neighborhood to-morrow," Phillipps replied, savagely. "If Mrs. Broadhurst had allowed me to manage my own affairs my own way things would have been all right and very different."

"You don't mean to say you'll throw Miss Arle over?" Major Noel was so excited at the thought of the evil time there was in store for him with his friend Mrs. Broadhurst, that he decided that he was justified in playing a strong card. "Why, the girl—she's as frank and fearless as a boy, you know——"

"I know she is, bless her!" Phillipps interrupted.

"I told Mrs. Broadhurst that you knew she loved you, and didn't care if all the rest in the world knew it, too. She's a brick of a girl, Phillipps. I'd not give her up because of anyone's chatter if I stood in your shoes."

"If you stood in my shoes, and loved Florence Arle as I do, you'd feel disposed to cut your—throat."

"Ah!" said Major Noel, with the resignation of an outsider, as he put his key into the door of his lodgings, "you'll look at things in a different light when you've tubbed and shaved, old fellow. I've no doubt it's a grind to give up your bachelor freedom, but she's worth the sacrifice, my boy, she's worth it."

He was lighting his candle and smiling airily as he spoke, but his smile died out as he marked the signs of a desperate mental struggle manifest themselves in Phillipps' face. The spirits of good and evil were wrestling in the heart of the man for the last time! When he spoke presently the battle was over, the angel had departed, and the devil was having it all his own way.

"You're right, Ned! she *is* worth any sacrifice I can make for her. If she'll have me I'll marry her to-morrow, and put it out of the power of Mrs. Broadhurst or anyone else to say I'm humbugging with her. I was in a rage just now—a foolish thing for a man of my age to get into. But I'm myself again, ready to forgive Mrs. Broadhurst and invite her to my wedding if she'll come."

"It's the privilege of the lady's people to invite the wedding guests," Major Noel explained with sleepy frivolity. His kind heart was gratified beyond measure with the promised result of his interference.

"Oh! it's the privilege of the lady's people, is it?" Phillipps asked drily, "you see I'm a novice in such matters. Anyway, old man, you shall not be omitted from the list." Then the two men shook hands very warmly, and Phillipps-Twysden felt quite an estimable person for

having inspired such a strong friendly feeling in the breast of such "a thorough gentleman and good fellow as Noel."

The following morning, after writing a letter to Violet, which he sent under cover to an agent in Amsterdam to have posted, he rode out to Eastmoor and asked Florence Arle to marry him. He had been so sure of her answer beforehand that there was not much excitement in receiving it. But he did feel a little agitated when, after having obtained the consent of her father and mother, her uncle, old Joe Cadly, began to catechise him.

"You must excuse me for asking a few questions, Mr. Phillipps, but Flo is almost like my own child, you understand, and as I wouldn't buy her a hunter that I didn't know something about, where 'twas bred, and whose training stable it came from, and so on, it isn't much to ask a man who wants to marry her the same thing, is it?"

It required every atom of the powerful self-control which Phillipps-Twysden had learnt to exercise over himself whenever his loss of it would have been damaging to any cherished scheme, that saved old Joe Cadly's visage from receiving one of those delicate attentions from the hands of his fellow-man which occasionally cause an instantaneous change in the position of the features. However, Mr. Phillipps remained calm, and Mr. Cadly undamaged. So he went on—taking out his little notebook as he spoke——

"Her father and mother and I are quite humble people compared to yours, I've no doubt, Mr. Phillipps, but our little Flo is fit to step in double harness with the best blood in England, and we should like to feel that your relations and friends recognise that truth before we give her up to you. It's not that we distrust you, you understand, but——"

"No, no! I feel sure of that," Mr. Phillipps interrupted. And then, with a fair show of candor, he went on to

aver (truthfully enough) that he had neither "father, mother, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, nor to the best of my belief, cousins," he added.

"Indeed! indeed, now! Not a relation left in the world, eh? Well 'tis sad! 'tis sad! But your wife's family must be the more to you, sir, as such is the case." Then old Joe Cadly shook Mr. Phillips by the hand, and patted him on the shoulder, and generally treated him with a freedom and cordiality that made Mr. Phillipps wish he had never entered upon this perilous path.

This was on the first day of the engagement, before the matter had been made public. Uncle Joe was so delighted with the way in which he had conducted these initial enquiries that by the time the affair got wind in their own circle he was the warmest and staunchest advocate Mr. Phillipps could have desired to find. The touch of pathos that old Joe discovered beneath the confession of the man's relationless condition was omnipotent.

"He's a good fellow, I'm convinced of that, Fanny," Mr. Cadly assured his sister when she expressed a little pardonable curiosity concerning Mr. Phillipps' antecedents.

"I've had a word with him, and I'm satisfied that he comes straight from a racing stable, and that he'll never disgrace it."

"I don't care where he comes from if he's good to my child," the mother said vehemently; "and I think he will be good to her, Joe; he told me just now that he didn't want to rob me of my child. Occasional visits to London, and a nice pleasant home in the country somewhere near here so that Florence may still be with us is what he is thinking of."

"He's a business man, I've understood, he mustn't give up looking after his business. I shall talk to him about that. Flo must follow her husband's fortunes; he musn't injure them for the sake of sentiment. Your daughter 'll be your daughter all your life, Fanny, but you mustn't

want to keep her down here when her husband's business takes him to London. A wife's place is by her husband's side, Fanny; no one knows that better than you, no one has put that knowledge into practice better than you, old girl, and your daughter will take after you, and be a crown of glory to her husband."

A clattering of horses' hoofs outside, as he spoke, was followed by the entrance into the room of Florence and Mr. Phillipps, just back from the exercising ground. Conceiving it to be an excellent opportunity of addressing a word in season to both the young people, Mr. Joe Cadly repeated his last remark sonorously——

"A wife's place is by her husband's side, whatever comes, I was saying to your mother, Flo, and I may add—and I am sure Mr. Phillipps will agree with me—that a husband's place is by his wife, weather permitting or not."

"My place shall be always by *your* side, Flo, my darling!" Phillipps exclaimed, and Florence at the same moment said lightly,——

"We mustn't let ourselves grow monotonous to each other—that would never do, would it, mother dear? I shall give you plenty of leave of absence, Jack, provided you always bring me back a clear account of what you've been doing, and where you've been. And I shall claim a fair length of rope, too. I won't be a stay-at-home household drudge because I wear a plain gold ring on my third finger."

"I'll paint Phillipps and you as *Benedict* and *Beatrice*. You look a delicious little shrew at this moment," Mr. Arle called out from his easy chair. And the conceit pleased them all so well that they grouped themselves again, and in a blissful interval of painlessness and slight access of power, Mr. Arle made a sketch which he afterwards worked up into a picture containing life-like portraits of his daughter and her lover, which he called

"Striking a blow for supremacy."

CHAPTER IX.

A CLOSE SHAVE.

WHEN the letter, which was posted at Amsterdam, reached Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden, it found her in a very comfortable state of resignation to her husband's prolonged absence! Her days were the reverse of dull now. Her spirits had re-asserted themselves and risen to the point of being perfectly in tune with and capable of enjoying the pleasant present. Her husband no longer counted in her scheme of daily life. Six years ago she had married him "for love," against the wish of her mother and the advice of every one, excepting old Lady Halford! And now she felt that she could do very well without him! She had Jack and a lovely home, the frequent society of a most congenial friend, perfect health, and the conviction that if her husband was ill-treating her by staying away so long, she had done nothing to deserve the ill-treatment.

There were moments indeed when Violet felt as if the presence again in his own house of Phillipps-Twysden would be rather a constraint and bore to her, instead of the comfort and blessing which the husband's presence is popularly supposed to be. As things were she could avoid the dullest part of conventional life—the dreary duty dinners which he insisted she should go to and give when he was at home, and the correspondingly dull and dreary calls which those dinners involved. In these days of perfect freedom she was justified in refusing all such invitations "in the absence of her husband," and in dining at any and every hour that pleased herself—or rather that pleased Jack! This in itself was a pleasure and relief to

a woman who for the last six years had been in the habit of dining out two or three times a week with people whom she never met excepting at dinner, and to whom she conscientiously meted out hospitality in return.

But—next to Jack—the greatest pleasure she now had in her daily life was the companionship of Lady Susan Meadows. The woman who loved Sir Lionel Halford, and the woman he loved, had come together, thanks to the pertinacity of the former, and become friends in a true hearty way that was good for them both. Old Lady Halford had been harassed by the duke's daughter into introducing her to Violet, and when once the introduction was achieved the friendship speedily established itself, and Lady Susan was a familiar figure on the canvas whereon the story of Violet's life was being painted by the time that letter came from Amsterdam.

From Lady Susan, Violet heard for the first time the story of how and why her husband had obtained possession of the name of Twysden. From Lady Susan too—but this was indiscreet—Violet heard how faithful Sir Lionel Halford still was to his true, generous, unselfish love for her. This information was conveyed in a few words—but they were very clear and convincing.

"I suppose you know that I have been dangled before Sir Lionel's eyes for a good many years, don't you?" Lady Susan said suddenly to Violet, when they had known one another about a week, and Violet answered that she "had often heard that it was to be a marriage some day."

"Well, don't believe what you've heard, but just believe what I tell you. Sir Lionel is a dear fellow, the *best* man I know. He will never marry me because he cares for another woman's little finger more than he could ever bring himself to care for the whole of my rather plain person. You know the woman I mean?"

"Yes, I know the woman you mean, and that woman is sorry to hear that he is so faithful to a young man's fancy."

"No, you're not sorry, my dear. You wouldn't be the nice, dear, true woman you are if in the middle of your heart you didn't feel glad to know yourself to be the object of one thorough man's life-long devotion."

"You forget I have a husband!" Violet said, with a dreary little effort at jocularity.

"Indeed, I had forgotten it!" Lady Susan said, frankly. Indeed Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden had need to remind herself of the fact occasionally in these essentially feminine Arcadian days.

But one day into the midst of this pure womanly and blameless Arcadia there came a disturbing element, and that in a guise that was above suspicion.

Mrs. Grove came to spend a long day with her daughter just two days after the receipt of that letter from Amsterdam. Mrs. Grove's visits to the house of her distrusted and disliked son in-law were things of rare occurrence, but now in "John's absence" Violet hailed the event joyfully, feeling that there would be no jar in their intercourse.

"All these weeks that I have been alone I have been disclaiming against provincial engagements, mother dear," Violet said warmly as she met Mrs. Grove, "but now that I see you looking so bonnie and well I feel inclined to bless the provinces, for I'm sure you have had successes. When did you come home?"

"Last night, dear! Jack, my beautiful boy, come and kiss your old grandmother, darling! how well he looks and how heavy he's getting——"

"Yes, isn't he glorious?" Violet interrupted in a burst of maternal pride, "you see I take him on the river every day and look after him generally so much more than I do when John is at home."

Mrs. Grove put her grandson off her lap, and took off her gloves as she remarked, carelessly:

"I saw Mr. Phillipps-Twysden in Plymouth yesterday.

He looked very well. Is he going to establish a branch business there?"

"In Plymouth?"

"Yes, dear, in Plymouth," Mrs. Grove replied cheerily. "I was driving through George Street, and I saw him riding with a group of extremely nice-looking people. My manager was with me, and I remarked to him 'That's my son-in-law,' and the foolish man nearly stopped the cab, thinking I wanted to speak to him. Imagine Mr. Twysden's feelings if I had spoken to him?" and she laughed lightly, and gave a rapid imitation of her son-in-law's look of stern contemptuous amazement.

"But it wasn't John! He's in Amsterdam. I heard from him two days ago," Violet said slowly; "he will be there for a month longer at least, and he had been there for a week when he wrote. You were mistaken."

Mrs. Grove looked at her daughter—and saw *that* in her daughter's face which frightened her into saying:

"No doubt I was mistaken, it was a strange likeness, that was all."

"Yet you know John's face so well," Violet went on uneasily. "I should pick him out among a thousand at once. Riding with nice-looking people, you say! and he *has* been in Plymouth. I wonder who they were?"

"Why should you wonder; *he* being in Amsterdam, you can't possibly have any interest in the people who were riding with the man who looked like him. Now take me round your gardens, Vi, dear, and I'll tell you my programme. To-morrow I go down West again—Bath, Bristol, Plymouth, Truro, and Penzance; and while I am away you must go and cheer up your father. Take Jack to see him, that's the greatest pleasure you can give him."

"Certainly. Oh, yes! but, mother, *could* you have been mistaken?"

"I was, without doubt, as your husband writes to you from Amsterdam. My dear Violet, don't look so tragic

about it. Come! tell me about this new friend, Lady Susan Meadows? Susan, why should the great of the earth stick to hideous names just because their uncultivated ancestors bore them?"

"You'd cease to think Susan a hideous name if you knew my new friend, mother. She's a dear woman. I don't wonder at old Lady Halford having set her heart on Susan for Sir Lionel."

"He hasn't set his heart on Lady Susan yet, has he?" Mrs. Grove asked, laughingly. She was mother of this woman on whom Sir Lionel had set his heart, and it pleased her maternal vanity that he should remain faithful.

"No, he's obstinate and obtuse about the matter," Violet said, absently. Then she added, with sudden sparkling animation—

"Mother, I haven't had a change since we came to Weybridge. I'm not wanted at home now. Why shouldn't Jack and I go with you on your next tour. I weary for you, mother, so often when you're away. Why shouldn't we go with you? Let me come, I have set my heart on it."

"The life wouldn't suit you, Violet, and I'm afraid the knowledge that you were present, jealously imagining that I was not getting half enough applause, would demoralise and make me nervous."

"I'll promise to be stoically indifferent to your success —let me come!"

The earnestness with which she pleaded her request carried the day against her mother's reasonable conviction that the plan was an unwise one.

The following day, in brilliant, almost feverishly high spirits, Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden, accompanied by her little son, met her mother at the Paddington terminus, and went down to Bath. The first night's success there was of such an unequivocal character that Mrs. Grove resolved to adventure upon a second night's entertainment, with slight

change of programme. On the third day they went on to Plymouth, and took rooms at the Royal Hotel for a week.

They reached Plymouth early in the day, and after luncheon Mrs. Grove proposed that they should go out and take a turn up George Street and upon the Hoe. It was all new to Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden, so she assented without a grumble to the George Street portion of the programme, though her maternal instincts were in favor of the sunny Hoe and its grand sea breezes, solely on Jack's account. Still she sympathised with her mother's natural professional desire to see for herself whether or not her agent had been advertising her properly by a judicious mixture of large letterings on hoardings, and cleverly touched-up photographs of her mature charms in shop windows. Accordingly they went down the steps of the Royal Hotel about three o'clock, and were crossing over to Derry's clock just as a neat little dog-cart, driven by a young lady with an elderly one by her side, and a young groom sitting behind, dashed past rapidly, but not so rapidly as to allow of its occupants escaping notice.

"That pretty girl is one of the party who were riding with the man who looked something like your husband, Violet," Mrs. Grove observed carelessly, and simultaneously the young lady in the dog-cart was exclaiming—

"What a pretty woman and boy. Strangers I should think! Did you notice them?"

"Probably she belongs to the new regiment that's just come to the Raglan Barracks. By-the-way, Flo, make your husband call on the regiment when you're settled. Then you'll have so much society that I shan't be always dreading he will take you away because you find it dull."

"When he is my husband, I'll settle about that. Come on quick now. He has to meet us at the photographer's at half-past three, you know. Come quick!" It seemed to Florence Arle that her elder companion was an unreasonably long time shaking the dust off her garments and

generally readjusting herself after their long drive as they stood in the yard of the Royal Hotel. For the girl had to meet an ardent and impatient lover, whereas her friend had nothing better in store than the prospect of witnessing the meeting.

But presently the dust was fairly shaken off, and the two ladies started to keep their appointment with Phillipps at one of the first photographers in George Street. About the same time, Mrs. Grove, Violet, and Jack were posing in an ecstacy of delight outside the same photographer's window, gazing at a most agreeable representation of Mrs. Grove in her most dramatic attitude, in one of her most celebrated pieces.

"There's that charming-looking woman and her lovely boy again," Florence Arle whispered to her friend as they passed into the shop. Then she straightway forgot all about the charming looking woman and her lovely boy, for down the centre of the shop came Mr. Phillipps, her distinguished-looking lover, to greet her eagerly.

As he did so Mrs. Grove stepped just inside the doorway, half turning round as she did so to remark to her daughter that "this would be a good place to have Jack taken; they succeed admirably with children here, Violet. Let us have Jack taken climbing a mast! he'll make a lovely picture."

Mr. John Phillipps, Florence Arle's affianced lover, heard these words, uttered in the voice he hated most on earth, and scuttled away into the dimmest recesses of the shop as fast as his legs could carry him.

CHAPTER X.

MR. PHILLIPPS-TWYSDEN FEELS ILL.

In perfect unconsciousness of the close proximity of her husband, Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden followed her mother into the shop, and stood for some minutes negotiating with the master of it for half a dozen panel-portraits of little Jack, to be taken the following day. Jack meanwhile skirmished about, and made his way at last into the long dark passage which led to the waiting-room. In this room, Phillipps-Twysden stood, half concealed by a huge stand of photographs.

"Here comes that sweet little golden-haired boy," Florence said, drawing Mrs. Broadhurst's attention to the handsome bold little invader.

"For Heaven's sake keep the child away from here; lead him back to his nurse or mother, or whoever she may be!" Jack's father whispered irritably; and Florence obeyed him, wondering the while at this unwonted display of temper on the part of her ordinarily lively, good-tempered lover. As she put her finger into his hand and led him back to the shop, she asked the little fellow's name, and he gave it out loudly, being rather proud of his own pronunciation of it.

"Jackie Philbs-Tisden, and that's my pa-pa's name, too;" and Florence stooped and kissed him as she delivered him up to his mother, and spoke a word or two of admiration that won the other woman's heart. Meanwhile Mr. Phillipps-Twysden peeped from behind the friendly shelter of the stand at them, and in his impatience and dread of detection almost cursed his wife for being there.

"It's that horrible mother of hers who's arranged this plan—she must have seen me when she was down here making a fool of herself the other day," he thought. And then a fierce dread of an immediate exposure and consequent loss of Florence beset him, and he muttered an entreaty to Mrs. Broadhurst "to go and fetch Flo back."

"Why don't you go yourself?" that blunt lady asked, and he muttered an excuse that he felt ill, "a sudden stitch in the left side—a thing that always alarmed him when it came on, as he feared it indicated a weak heart."

"Fiddle-de-de!" was Mrs. Broadhurst's unsympathetic reply, "your heart's strong enough. However, if you feel ill, come along back to the hotel, and rest while Florence and I do our shopping."

She was making for the dark passage as she spoke, taking it for granted that he was following her; but, having to step aside to make room for a tall, handsome, matronly woman to pass her, she looked back, and saw Mr. Phillipps hastily making for the staircase that led to the dressing-rooms and the atelier where the photographs were taken.

Someone else caught sight of his vanishing back also, and that was the tall, handsome, matronly lady for whom Mrs. Broadhurst had stood aside, and who, of course, was none other than his much-detested mother-in-law. She recognised him, and was on the point of calling him by name, but a feeling partly of dread and partly of contempt stopped her.

"The wretched creature wants to avoid Violet! Well, a meeting with her would be no pleasure, and only spoil her holiday, poor child," Mrs. Grove thought, as she marched with head erect to inspect some of the photographs on that stand behind which Mr. Phillipps-Twysden had been hiding. She did not for an instant suspect that he stood in any other relation to the buxom country lady and the young girl who was with her than that of a mere

casual acquaintance, or she would have risked a scene and denounced him on the spot. As it was, her one anxiety was now to get Violet out of the shop without encountering her husband. So, after cursorily glancing at the photographs, she turned back and rejoined her daughter.

"Let us go up on the Hoe and give Jack some sea air," she said aloud, "the streets stifle me to-day. Come, Violet, I want the sea air as much as Jack does if I am to get through my work to night."

"Who are those ladies?" Florence Arle asked, and the attendant behind the counter told her that "the elder lady is the celebrated Mrs. Grove. She gives her musical and dramatic entertainment to-night. The young lady is a stranger, perhaps she may have joined Mrs. Grove in the entertainment, which is considered a very good one." Then one of Mrs. Grove's bills was handed to Florence, who stood thoughtfully reading it till she was joined by Mrs. Broadhurst.

"Where is John?" she then asked, "I want to go to this," handing the bill of the entertainment to her friend as she spoke, "and I want you to stay in Plymouth to-morrow, like the dear you are. You will, won't you?"

"I'm but a frivolous old thing, and very fond of anything that promises a little amusing excitement, so I'll stay if you've set your heart on going, Flo!"

"I have, indeed; I'm quite fascinated by the look of Mrs. Grove. Where is John? He must go and send sixpenny telegrams to mamma and Mr. Broadhurst, telling them not to expect us to-night."

"Mr. Phillipps complains of feeling poorly; he has gone up to rest in the gentlemen's waiting-room. Shall we send for him?"

"Poor, dear fellow, if he's ill I won't think of staying; we'll go at once and take him back with us and mamma shall nurse him. She's as perfect a nurse as she is everything else. Will you send for Mr. Phillipps and ask if he

is well enough to come down?" she went on eagerly to the attendant, who went on the mission and presently returned, followed by Mr. Phillipps, that gentleman having assured himself by enquiry that the obnoxious Mrs. Grove and her companion had left the shop.

"Are you ill?—are you better?" Florence asked in one breath; and he, rebounding into high spirits in a moment, now that the fear of immediate detection was over and the painful tension relaxed, replied hilariously:

"Never better in my life. It was nothing but a passing stitch in my side, as Mrs. Broadhurst said. I'm game for anything you like now."

"Well, listen to our plan, then! Mrs. Broadhurst and I want to stay in Plymouth to-night, so you must send telegrams to Mr. Broadhurst and mamma. Do you hear?"

"You want to go to the theatre?" he asked cheerfully, feeling that at the theatre they would be quite safe from the ghastly chance of meeting either his wife or her mother. The latter "would be making a fool of herself at some hall or other in her own entertainment," he knew.

"No, not the theatre, something quite as delightful, though," Florence explained brightly. "Have you ever heard of a Mrs. Grove? Look! here she is!" They were passing a piano shop at the moment, in whose window a full-length portrait of Mrs. Grove in one of her numerous characters was displayed. It was of this portrait Florence spoke when she said, "Look! here she is!" but her lover's guilty conscience made him fancy that she was speaking of Mrs. Grove in the flesh, and with a smothered oath he crossed the street rapidly and entered a confectioner's.

"John must be ill!" Florence said pityingly, as she and Mrs. Broadhurst followed him. "He turned awfully white, did you see?"

"I thought he looked odd!" Mrs. Broadhurst said drily. She was conscious of vaguely suspecting the man

of something, but her thoughts were in disorder and the suspicions were quite formless as yet. "I don't believe it's his heart, I believe he is frightened," she said to herself, as she waited outside while Florence went in to enquire in affectionate solicitude if "John felt ill again!"

"Yes, I do, my darling!" he answered impatiently, "so ill that I can't walk back to the hotel. If Mrs. Broadhurst and you will go and do your shopping and send the first cab you meet here for me, I'll go back and rest in my own room for an hour or two. I'm afraid you'll have to go to this entertainment (it cost him an effort to speak of it) alone, you two ladies, to-night, for I want to be well enough to go home with you to-morrow, Flo, therefore I had better rest as much as I can to day. Don't be alarmed, dear, a few hours' rest will set me all right again."

Greatly disappointed, and wondering not a little, Florence had to accept these conditions, and leave him while she went first for a cab and then to do her shopping. But she went about her work in a half-hearted way that revealed her stifled anxiety to Mrs. Broadhurst, who was growing more suspicious of something being wrong every minute, but whose suspicions were still formless.

Meantime, Mr. Phillipps had shot out of the shop and into the cab, with a celerity that was quite incompatible with weakness or suffering. He had then shrunk into a corner and pulled his hat well down over his brow, and given the order for the cab to be driven into the yard of the Royal, in order that he might enter the hotel by the less public side-entrance. If once he could gain the friendly shelter of his own bed-room, there he would remain, he was resolved, until such time as Mrs. Grove's engagements should take her away from Plymouth. He hated his wife at this juncture almost as much as he did her mother; and regarded it as a piece of gross disobedience and disloyalty to himself that Violet should have left her home in such company during his absence. "Such

conduct proved that she deserved neither my love nor confidence," he told himself, holding himself more and more blameless, as he persuaded himself to regard Violet's action in a more and more culpable light each moment. "To drag the innocent boy about in the train of that woman when she's what she calls 'on tour,' too! It is unpardonable! disgusting! It justifies anything I may do.

Nevertheless, justifiable as he felt his conduct to be, he shrank from coming into contact with either his wife or her mother, and so possibly being compelled to justify it. The way in which he slid into the side-entrance and up the stairs of the hotel, into his own room, would have been suggestive of anything rather than happy security in his own position, had anyone seen him who knew the case.

He caught a glimpse of his own pale face in the glass, and felt that his hand trembled as he poured himself out a thimbleful of brandy.

"If I can only get Florence home before that cursed woman sees me, things will arrange themselves," he muttered as he strove to stand upright, and pretended to himself that he would presently go down to the coffee-room and take a manly interest in the London dailies, which would be coming in about this time.

But the pretence failed! For as he opened his bedroom door, he caught sight of his little son careering along the corridor, and heard Violet's voice cautioning her boy "not to make a noise and disturb people."

"My God, what a net I'm in, *what* a net I'm in!" he thought, as he hastily closed the door and locked it against all enemies—save the devil, who was in possession of him.

CHAPTER XI.

A MASCULINE POINT OF VIEW.

FLORENCE ARLE spent all her money and a couple of hours full of extremely mixed feelings in three or four of Plymouth's most seductive shops that day. The girl had no unreasonable caprices or fads to gratify, therefore she made the work of selection of materials short and easy work for those who served her as a rule. But this day her mind was disturbed by little anxious thoughts, and little worrying, baseless forebodings, and she could not decide upon what she wanted with her usual promptitude and vigor.

As a matter of course she, being very much in love with him, not only believed the illness with which Mr. Phillipps had been seized to be thoroughly genuine, but she exaggerated the symptoms, and pestered Mrs. Broadhurst by dragging forth her opinions concerning them.

"Do you think he has a weak heart?" she began questioning, and Mrs. Broadhurst, touched by the girl's quivering lips and wistful eyes, answered:

"No, my dear, not a weak heart!" and refrained from adding that she thought he had a bad one.

"Did you see how white he turned, that dreadful ashen look that mother always says means heart-mischief, when we were walking along George Street?" Florence persisted.

"I saw he looked pale, but Mr. Phillipps is never ruddy, Flo. Now, my dear child, give your mind to this white silk, or your wedding-dress will never be ready."

"I know what I should like to do," Florence said, thoughtfully, "you must help me to persuade mother to

let me do it. I should like to be married in the habit I wore that first day I met John at your house, and instead of going back to a breakfast I should like to ride straight away from the church door on the Performer colt I've broken in since I've been engaged to John. Uncle Joe has given me the colt for my very own, and I mix it up with John to a great extent, and we should feel as if we all belonged so very much to one another if we rode away into the world and the new life together.

Mrs. Broadhurst nearly choked in her efforts to suppress any visible sign of emotion. The effort imparted a coldness she was far from feeling to her reply.

"I am never an advocate for a departure into the doubtful land of sentimentality, and it seems to me that such a wedding tour would look affected and *outré* in the eyes of the neighborhood."

"The neighborhood needn't concern itself with us. I'm only Joe Cadly's niece to the neighborhood, and John is a stranger."

"Well, dear, let me add, I don't think your mother would like it, and may I further plead that I shouldn't like it either. I want you to go forth as Mrs. Phillipps with all honorable publicity——"

"But John hates fuss and show!"

"There need be no fuss, and he ought to be proud to show you to his family. Who of them are coming to it, Flo?"

"He has no relations. Uncle Joe has questioned and bothered him a good deal, I'm afraid. I'm glad to think that I shall have him all to myself, but dear old Uncle Joe seems to think that it would add materially to my happiness if I could be plunged into the midst of a lot of new uncles and aunts and cousins."

Mrs. Broadhurst gave an abrupt sigh, checked it, and turned it into a laugh as Florence's eyes fixed themselves on hers reproachfully.

"If Mr. Phillipps will bring two or three old friends to the wedding, I'll persuade your mother to let you ride away from the church door, but they must be nice friends, married men and their wives, my dear, not frisky bachelors, who think little of having a wife in every port, and nothing of the girls they leave behind them when the route comes."

Florence laughed out brightly. "We'll go back to the Royal and have some tea, and John shall describe some of his married friends, and we'll 'sample' them. Probably they're all swells who will turn up their noses at the horse-breeder's niece, until they hear what papa is and what he would have been if he hadn't been afflicted."

"We'll hear about them, whatever they may be," Mrs. Broadhurst declared. But they were not destined to do this yet awhile. On their sending up to tell Mr. Phillipps they were waiting for him to have tea with them in the ladies' drawing-room, the message came back that "Mr. Phillipps still felt too poorly to leave his room; would they have tea without him, and promise to please him greatly by going to the entertainment as proposed without regarding him."

"It will be unfeeling to go," said Florence.

"It will be idiotic to remain here doing nothing because Mr. Phillipps has a nervous headache," said Mrs. Broadhurst. Her influence kicked the beam, and so it came to pass that by-and-bye Phillipps-Twysden had the satisfaction of hearing that the ladies of his party had gone out for the evening.

"They'll be in good time, sir," the waiter added, "for Mrs. Grove's cab's at the door, and she and her party are just starting."

"Freed from the lot of them for this night, at least!" Phillipps-Twysden thought complacently, and on the strength of this sensation of security he ordered an agreeable little dinner to be ready for him in the coffee-room in

half-an-hour. Meanwhile, he glanced over his various correspondence which had come in by a late post, and had the satisfaction of ascertaining that his "House" had just secured an exorbitantly remunerative contract.

"Violet will not have to complain of a reduced establishment, at any rate," he thought self-approvingly, as he stepped out into the corridor on his way down to the dinner he was so well prepared to enjoy. He had been fasting unintentionally since his early breakfast, and now that all his feminine environments were safely out of the way, "entertaining" and being "entertained," he allowed himself to look forward with a hungry man's wholesome appetite to the dinner that was awaiting him.

But as he stepped into the corridor he received a shock and his appetite fled. Rushing along, breathless and laughing, came a child, followed by a lady, and as they pulled up abruptly close to him, checked by his presence, he recognised his wife and son, and was recognised simultaneously by them.

In one instant he decided upon his plan of action. He would sternly reprove Violet for having dared to leave her home in his absence without his permission, and so carry the war into her quarters. But before he could speak Jack had sprung at him, crying out, "Papa! here's papa!" and Violet had uttered an exclamation of amazement and consternation.

"John! John! you here?" she had said loud enough for the chambermaid to hear her at the other end of the passage; and then she had gone to him and held up her face for him to kiss, and altogether behaved in a way that roused the virtuous curiosity of the chambermaid to a maddening pitch, and caused that functionary to presently murmur her suspicions to her colleague that "Mrs. Grove's daughter was no better than she should be."

"I am shocked and horrified at meeting you here. You must explain your conduct very fully before I can greet

you as my wife," he said loftily, in his lowest tone. "Put the boy to bed, and then if your conduct is defensible, come to me and defend it. You will find me in that private sitting-room just opposite."

She looked at him with such cold indignation in her eyes, that for a moment his false courage deserted him, and his hardened heart throbbed painfully.

"When we meet, and an explanation takes place between us, it will not be my conduct that will have to be defended," she said quietly. Then she took hold firmly of Jack's hand, and told him in unsubdued tones, that reached the ears of the chambermaid, to say "Good-night to his father, and come to bed."

He went on to the coffee-room and fortified himself for what was to follow by eating a good dinner; but his appetite was gone, he did not enjoy it. Still, he compelled himself to eat, for he knew that his nerves would be strengthened and his brain made clearer by the food. When he had dined he wrote two notes. One he addressed to Mrs. Grove, the other to Mrs. Broadhurst. The contents of the first were as follows:

"MADAM:—Until Violet returns to her home and ceases to hold any intercourse with you, I decline to meet or hold intercourse with her.

"PHILLIPPS-TWYSDEN."

To Mrs. Broadhurst he wrote:

"DEAR MRS. BROADHURST:—You had scarcely left the hotel this evening when I received a telegram summoning me to Town on the omnipotent 'House's' business. I hope, by going up through the night, that I may get through my work in the City in time to come down again to-morrow evening, when I shall drive straight from the station to the Arles'. Tell Flo, with my love, that I trust this will be my last journey alone! I am quite anxious to see the result of your shopping to-day, and hope that all

the wedding-garments will be ready in a week, or I shall take her away without them.

"Yours sincerely,

"JOHN PHILLIPPS."

In a few minutes he had paid his bill, packed, and ordered a hansom. As he was stepping into it, he called the hall-porter and gave him the note for Mrs. Broadhurst, to be delivered to that lady on her return. The chamber-maid already had charge of and orders respecting the missive for Mrs. Grove.

"Violet's devilish pride will prevent her making a row and causing an exposure," he told himself as the train rushed through the darkness, bearing him rapidly towards the great city where he and his iniquities would be safe from the importunities and investigations of the two women whom he had wronged so hideously. No softening thought of the sorrow, strengthened by suspicion, which must of necessity be Violet's portion, entered his mind to oppress it. But he was annoyed when he reflected that his sudden, almost unexplained departure, would cause Florence disappointment and anxiety. Worse still! it would arouse anew that exasperating curiosity which Mrs. Broadhurst was apt to display about him.

"That infernal woman will soon be at the bottom of the whole thing if she gets hold of Mrs. Grove, and my precious mother-in-law will paint a pretty picture of me for my poor Flo to hang up in her mental gallery for the rest of her life," he told himself savagely. There was no pathos in the situation as far as the women were concerned to him. But when he remembered little Jack a lump came into his throat.

"The little chap ran to me as if he loved me. If Violet doesn't let him go on loving me, she's a worse woman than I take her to be; but there's no knowing what spirit of vindictiveness that mother of hers may succeed in implanting in her. An unprincipled old hag like that wouldn't stick even at robbing a father of the love of his child."

He took quite a pleasant, self-satisfied view of his own character and actions as he contrasted them with those of Mrs. Grove. He had never led a wife to fly in the face of her husband by luring her to go "on tour" with him in a fifth-rate entertainment in that husband's absence from home. *He* had never degraded his family by making an ass of himself in public—by singing without a voice, acting without any histrionic talent or dramatic feeling, and exhibiting these failures at low prices in second-rate Institutes and Guild halls to third-rate audiences. His superiority to these weaknesses of Mrs. Grove led him to place himself immeasurably above her in the moral and social scale. It was astonishing how readily Mrs. Grove's character adapted itself to the lower place which he assigned it in his estimation, and how his own soared to purer heights by comparison. "That woman will have much to answer for; I hold her accountable for much in Violet's conduct which has made the prospect of life lived with Violet alone insupportable to me," was one of his last waking thoughts. Then he slumbered till the train ran into Paddington, and as he travelled in a first-class carriage with plenty of rugs, he slumbered comfortably.

Mrs. Broadhurst and her charge returned to the Royal in good spirits. They had thoroughly enjoyed Mrs. Grove's entertainment—they were not hypercritical about singing and acting, but allowed themselves to be pleased with what amused them. It was a disappointment to Florence that the graceful, pretty woman whom she had seen in the photographer's shop took no part in the performance, because the girl had been interested in Violet's sweet, clever, sorrowful face. Still Mrs. Grove kept the interest of the house well centred upon herself and Florence enjoyed herself.

But when they reached the hotel and the hall-porter gave Mr. Phillipps' note to Mrs. Broadhurst, Florence's alarm and anxiety obliterated all recollection of past

pleasure, and she was desperately and unfeignedly miserable.

"The business is only a *ruse*, I'm certain," she exclaimed, and Mrs. Broadhurst, who was inclined to think the same thing, though her reasons for coming to such a conclusion were widely different from Florence's, could not heartily combat the girl's fears.

"He is ill—much worse than he made out, and he's gone to consult a doctor."

"I don't believe he's ill a bit," Mrs. Broadhurst said stolildy, "if you are going to worry yourself about everything he does without informing you, your life with that man will be a miserable one, Florence."

"I shall never want to pry into his private business when I'm his wife, but now if they find out at home that he has gone without telling me why he went they will wonder and speculate about it. At least Uncle Joe will—he likes to invest John's simplest actions with mystery."

"Your Uncle Joe will never judge any man unjustly, Flo."

"Now, you're suspecting something," Florence said irritably. She was so sensitive in her anxiety about her lover that she fancied every man's hand was against him at this juncture, and she was angry with herself also. For, at the bottom of this intense sensitiveness concerning him, she knew there was an undefined fear of an undefined something in his past career which might rise up some day to her lasting pain and his injury.

In this frame of mind she went home the following day, trying her hardest to bear herself light-heartedly and cheerfully. But her Uncle Joe saw through the pretence, and his honest old heart foreboded ill for his pet, but not such woeful ill as that which was before her in reality.

"The coward! the pitiful false coward!" was Mrs. Grove's mental comment on her son-in-law's letter. But to her daughter she said no harder words of him than she

might have used had his sole offence been his dislike to herself.

"Your husband's antipathy to me seems to be strengthening, my dear child, so I mustn't counsel you to fly in his face by going on with me as we had proposed," she said as she handed his letter to Violet.

"You don't mean that you advise me to go home, mother, after his deceiving me as he has done, pretending to be in Holland on business when he was here on pleasure all the time."

"You mustn't give him any cause of complaint against you. How did he seem when you met him?"

"Cold as ice," Violet said concisely, "nearly as cold as I was myself."

"My poor child! I dare not say what I feel about him. He is your husband, he has given you no cause to leave him! As your mother, the only advice I can give you is to go home and bear your trial patiently, and, above all, try, for your boy's sake, to avoid quarrels and a separation. A mother is bound to suffer anything rather than deprive her child of either its father's or her own care. Couples who separate damage their children inevitably, though there may be no dishonor in the separation. For Jack's sake bear your real and fancied wrongs patiently, and *never* commit the mistake of leaving your home."

"You appear to forget that he makes our living together conditional on my giving you up, "Violet sobbed. "O, mother, mother! how shall I live my wretched life without the comfort of seeing you occasionally. You are my sustaining power? If he robs me of that he will soon break me down utterly."

"No, no, Violet, the back will be fitted to the burden," Mrs. Grove said, with a mighty effort at cheerfulness that spoke volumes for the unselfish strength and purity of her motherly love—"Your love will be with me always, my darling, mine with you; but your first duty is to your husband and your child."

CHAPTER XII.

SOME OF LADY SUSAN'S VIEWS.

"THE Phillipps-Twysdens are home again at last!" people about Weybridge said to one another. There had been a little gossip about the long absence of the master of the house at one time, for though Violet had always answered cheerfully when questioned "that it was the odious business which kept him away," the majority had not believed her. It was known he and his wife's parents were not on friendly terms, and the charitable many put it down to the account against the Groves that they had "not only muddled away their own money, but had behaved shabbily to that charming Phillipps-Twysden by leading him to suppose he would have a fortune with his wife," of which their bankruptcy had defrauded him. On the whole, therefore, though Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden was a popular and well-liked woman, she was held to be an extremely fortunate one, and one who owed a deep debt of gratitude to her rich, prosperous, lavish husband.

Acting on her mother's advice, Violet had gone home the day following that awkward *rencontre* with her husband in the Royal Hotel, and there she had found him awaiting her, and ready to receive any explanation of her conduct which she might have to offer in a calmly judicial spirit. The way in which he had put her in the wrong place and made her feel she had been rash, imprudent and guilty of wilful indiscretions and disobedience, almost paralysed her faculties, and quite robbed her of the power of counter-questioning him.

"I'll look over it this time, but, mind you, Violet, this

must never occur again," he said with an air of closing the subject when she explained to him that as she had believed him to be in Amsterdam she had thought it no harm to go down to Plymouth with her mother.

"My business is like an octopus, it stretches in all manners of unforeseen directions, and as I am the vital spark of it, there is no knowing when or where, or how often, or for how long I may be called upon to go away in its interests. It is your duty and privilege to remain at home taking care of our child, and maintaining the home in all its peaceful beauty and integrity. I have a right to ask this much of you. Remember I got nothing else with you towards the maintenance of our home."

"Don't reproach me because I brought you no fortune ——" she was beginning, but he checked her.

"I am not idiotic enough to reproach *you* with the fault of your fraudulent old father——"

"John!"

"Don't shriek, my dear, fury is unbecoming to you. I repeat I don't reproach you with his fault, but I do claim that you should respect my wishes when I tell you that I will not allow you to have your mother here, or to travel with her. You may go and see her sometimes in their own house, that is the extent of the concession I can make. If you won't accept those terms, you had better make up your mind to live apart from me altogether, never to see me again in fact."

He dropped the mask for a moment and looked the anxiety he felt that she should accept the alternative and part from him altogether. That look decided her! She resolved that at any cost she would retain her right to her home and her child!

"It shall not be my fault if we live apart."

A spasm of disappointment convulsed and altered his face out of resemblance to the one she had fallen in love with, and she added bitterly:

"I shall still do for a housekeeper, and as while I live you can't marry again, tired as you may be of me, I will stay here and exercise my privilege to the utmost. You shall not have to complain of my leaving the house again, and mamma will never come here when she understands that her presence in her daughter's house may force her daughter into even a falser position than the one she occupies now."

"Don't pose as a martyr, or if you do, don't expect me to pose as a tyrant." He laughed lightly, having quite recovered his usual cool, indifferent, self-possessed manner. On the whole matters had arranged themselves comfortably enough. "If Violet liked to stick to him, she would not be much in his way while she elected to stay at home." That was the way he put it! She was the mother of the boy, and would take more care of the boy than any hireling would take, therefore it was as well, perhaps, that she should refuse to give him that absolute liberty which a formal separation would ensure him. By-and-bye, when the boy was older, a different arrangement might be advisable. But for the present he was quite contented to let the existing state of things continue undisturbed.

So, for a few days, he stayed at home, going to the City daily, and taking care to have people to dine with them every night. The narrow escape from the great danger of detection which he had had down at Plymouth made him feel quite light-hearted and good-tempered. "By Jove! but it was a narrow squeak for it, both of them on the spot," he thought with a complacent chuckle, as he recalled the episode in the photographer's shop. "I should have said the right thing and come out of it scathless, I've no doubt, even if they had closed me in between them. But what should I have said? That's the mischief of it. I shall never know how brilliant a disarmer I might have uttered."

These and similar ideas coursed through his brain fre-

quently, until he began to regard his relations with his wife and Florence Arle as a big and agreeably complicated game of chess—which he was bound to win finally, he being an expert, and his opponents mere tyros at it. Meanwhile he thought out his next *move* exhaustively, and at the same time endeared himself more than ever to his loving little son.

"A great deal of my misery must be my own fault. John's tenderness to our boy ought to cover all his faults of neglect towards me," Violet would often think, as she watched her husband's untiring efforts to please and amuse the bright, erratic minded little boy, who had an insatiable greed for change of occupation. It roused a little jealous feeling in her overtried heart that the child should turn from her with rapturous delight when his father proposed a ride on a miniature pony or a row on the river. With the unconscious selfishness of child-love Jack never thought of asking his mother to go with him on these occasions. He had "papa," and that was enough. "Papa" would let him gallop without a leading-rein. "Papa" could make the boat fly through the water. "Papa" was big and strong, and always laughing and merry, whereas mamma often cried in these latter days. In fact, though Jack loved his mother dearly, he got more excitement and amusement out of the companionship of his father, and Violet tried to feel grateful to her husband for the pleasure he gave their child, and strove resolutely to keep regretful and repining thoughts concerning herself at bay.

During these few days of domesticity at Weybridge, Phillipps-Twysden was in a very contradictory and unsettled state of mind. There were moments when he felt that it would be more prudent and pleasanter in the long run if he suffered Florence Arle and his projects about her to slip away into the limbo of forgotten and neglected things. It would be easy enough to do it. They only knew him as John Phillipps; the name was common enough

and they would get on a hundred wrong scents if they did try to run him to earth. "But Flo would never let them do it—the darling!" he thought, and the thought made him feel more keenly desirous of seeing that darling again, though to do so would be to court her destruction and his own.

So, instead of letting her slip away from him, he spent hours at his club writing letters full of true passion and false promise to her; giving such a plausible account of himself and the business that had taken him back to town that even Uncle Joe was bound to admit himself "satisfied with the fellow."

One day he went home earlier than usual, and found Violet had a visitor, and he was a prey to mixed feelings when that visitor told him that "her father and his uncle were very old and staunch friends."

"So you see, I knew all about you before I had the pleasure of meeting with your wife," Lady Susan said frankly. "And now that I know you better, you must let me take Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden home with me and introduce her to those dear old people."

"I think Violet had better wait for their invitation."

"Ah! that's a mistake on your part, you make your wife wait for an invitation which will never be given, because they fancy that she's a regular society woman who won't care for them and their rustic old-fashioned ways."

"You are very good to point out my mistakes, and try to rectify them, Lady Suzan!"

He spoke politely, but Lady Susan felt that venom lurked behind the suavity, and glanced uneasily from the husband to the wife.

"I hope you do not think me meddlesome and interfering?" she said gently, "pray believe that it is only my intense desire to see more of Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden which makes me want to get her down in our neighborhood to your own people, who are our friends."

"I will take Violet there myself," he said gaily, "you shall not make out a case of conspiracy to keep my wife dark against me, Lady Susan. I will take her down and leave her there to be taken care of the next time business calls me away from home for a few weeks."

It was such a brilliant inspiration this that he felt quite well disposed towards Lady Susan for putting it into his head. During those absences from his Weybridge home, which in the future would be more frequent and more prolonged than hitherto, Violet could not be more safely disposed of than with the old people down at Houndell, who lived out of the world, and were contented to know nothing whatever of what took place in it. He knew that they would treat Violet tenderly, and make much of her for her own sake as well as out of regard for his unworthy self. Tired as he was of his wife, impatient as he always felt now to get away from her, little as he thought of her when she was out of his sight, he still had sufficient discernment of what was good left to know that the old people down at Houndell would prize her highly, and keep her with them as much as possible. He also salved his conscience by telling it that the country air would be beneficial both to his boy and his wife. And while Violet was being so benefited, he could bring that other one—that other dearer, fresher woman of whom he had not tired yet—to town to see a little of the London life, for which she was ignorantly and innocently longing.

So, on taking all these things into account, he became not only reconciled to, but actually pleased with the prospect Lady Susan had put before him. The old Twysdens were simple-minded old people, who would believe all that he liked to tell them, both as regarded his past conduct in keeping Violet away from them, and the reason of his being compelled to absent himself from her so often in the future.

"They're a weak, credulous lot, luckily for me," he

laughed to himself; "they've none of that confounded prying underbred curiosity about them, which distinguishes Flo's friend Mrs. Broadhurst, and my precious mother-in-law. Violet will be quite safe from contamination in their unsuspicious old hands."

His favorable opinion of the guilelessly credulous Twysdens was pointed by the sternly condemnatory view he felt compelled to take of Mrs. Grove's current conduct. That lady had not troubled him with a lengthy reply to that letter which he had left for her guidance in Plymouth. She answered it in a few words only, but those words annoyed him, though he affected to sneer at them.

"I will find you out," was all she wrote, but he read that she meant what she threatened in the formation of each letter.

Lady Susan Meadows went away from the Weybridge house that day with a much pleasanter impression of its master than she had conceived it possible to have when first they met. "He seems to adore his boy, and his manner to his wife was more that of a lover than of a husband of six years' standing," she told Sir Lionel Halford afterwards.

"Then his manner must have been ridiculous," Sir Lionel said bluntly.

"Ah! no! he is a clever man; he may do bad things, but not silly ones. When he gathered the best flower in the greenhouse for his wife, and let it be seen that even in the matter of dinner-table decoration he will have the colored flowers that suit her best, he didn't strike me as either affected or ridiculous at all! I liked him for it."

"He takes in most people at first, but I happen to know that though he may study the color that suits her best on the dinner-table, he starves her heart. He separates her from her mother, and gives her nothing in exchange for that robbery——"

"How do you know that?" she questioned sharply.

"You speak in a way that would mislead anyone who knew her less well than I do into thinking that Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden made confidences to you."

"But you see I know you couldn't fall into that error about her. My mother is my informant. She tells me that Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden is notoriously an unhappy woman."

"Your mother ought to be ashamed of herself," Lady Susan spoke angrily, as she felt. It was a little too much to hear, after all that had come and gone, that Lady Halford was trying to rouse her son's chivalric feeling for a woman towards whom it could never be displayed with satisfactory results to either of them.

"Lady Halford should really let the case alone; her interference will do no more good now than it did when she persuaded you to introduce Mr. Phillipps-Twysden to the Groves years ago. You had better listen to me, and believe that Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden is a happy mother and a satisfied wife."

"You know he won't let her receive her mother in her own house."

"My dear Sir Lionel, I know that many men split on the mother-in-law rock. You see I don't know Mrs. Grove. She may be an injudicious interfering woman, and against such the majority of sons-in-law kick."

"Ah! but she's not," he put in eagerly; "she's one of the nicest, cleverest women that ever worked her brain to pieces for the welfare of those dear to her. Don't depreciate Mrs. Grove in your desire to extenuate that fellow's conduct."

"And don't let us quarrel," she rejoined heartily, "take my advice; think the best of him, for her sake. Nothing can unmarry them, you know; therefore nothing can free her from the consequences of the choice she made. With all my heart I wish she had made another choice! With all my heart I sympathise with your disinterested desire

for her perfect happiness. But not one woman in a thousand is born to that inheritance ; our friend is not that one woman I admit, still there are many compensating circumstances in her case, and I think if you will be contented to take things as they seem we may be all very happy together, and see much more of each other, as become the members of a friendly circle in the future."

Then she went on to tell him how it was planned that Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden should be taken down at last and introduced by her husband to those friends of his at Houndell, from whom he still had great expectations.

"And as we shall be down there a good deal this winter I shall see much more of Violet than I can ever manage to do in town. And if you're good, and sensible, and unsentimental, you will come and stay with us, and we'll all be as friendly as possible, even with the husband."

"You're the kindest-hearted woman in the world, Susan."

She laughed. "Kind-heartedness isn't a fascinating quality, I know ; but how have I blundered now?"

"You haven't blundered, you've only made me feel that I have done so myself. It was priggish of me to speak as if I could improve upon a fellow's management of his domestic affairs."

"After that long and extremely confidential conversation with Halford to-night, I suppose you are going to take refuge in marriage from the boredom of such a very pronounced friendship," the duchess said to her daughter.

"He has no more thought of marrying me than he has of marrying you, mamma."

"But if the thought ever comes to him—what then? You can't go on in this absurd 'old friendly' way for ever! The fact is, Susan, you don't know how to manage him. You encourage him in the folly of believing himself faithful to the idea of that calf-love of his for Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden. A practical question from me as to when he wished the wedding-day fixed would settle everything."

"I think it would!"

"Then shall I ask the question?"

"Not if you wish the wedding-day ever to be settled," Lady Susan said drily, and the mother thought the daughter's manner "very nasty," and was more at sea than ever as to what "Susan's intentions really were about Lionel Halford!"

"After all these years! as he hasn't married anyone else, he might just as well take Susan, she'll never be plainer than she is now," the duchess thought, dealing unintentionally with that question which sometimes troubled the male mind as to how time will treat the beloved face. "A word or two from me would put things straight between —but there's something about Susan that forbids my saying it, and probably Sir Lionel feels just as I do about it!"

Probably Sir Lionel did feel the restraining influence at this juncture. At any rate friendship was the sole link between the pair when he took leave of Lady Susan that night. But he missed her when she went out of town, and was glad when he was invited to join the house-party down at Meadshire House, though he did not know that Mr. and Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden were staying with their friends at Houndell.

CHAPTER XIII.

FLORENCE'S FIRST FEARS.

"THAT engagement of Florence Arle's seems to hang fire."

"Can't imagine what her people could have been thinking about, to let the girl engage herself to a man who came here without any proper introduction."

"Should have thought, for my own part, that old Joe Cadly would have been shrewder about a 'deal' of that kind."

"Let me see !—What brought that man Phillipps here at first nominally ? "

"Why, he's a friend of Noel's, and was staying with Noel for a long time. He's all right enough ! The Broadhursts know all about him. Mrs. Broadhurst made up the match, in fact."

These and many other remarks in a similar strain were made with tolerable frequency in these days, whenever a group of people who knew anything of Florence Arle and her love-affair were met together. The man to whom she was engaged had come down handicapped by the fact of being a stranger, who did not happen to hold Her Majesty's Commission in either of the Services. And this fact naturally militated against him in an atmosphere that is impregnated with service feeling, as of necessity the atmosphere of all essentially military and naval towns must be. Nevertheless, he had been accepted freely after a brief period, both on account of his intimacy with Major Noel and by right of his own individuality, and that prepossessing power of the purse, which is apt to have a certain weight even in the highest-minded and most disinterested society. For a time, indeed, there had been no more popular man than Mr. Phillipps at the innumerable dinners, tennis parties, and little dances, which are always taking place in the three towns. It was only when it got noised abroad that he had engaged himself to pretty Miss Arle, the horse-breeder's niece, that the ladies of the locality resumed prudent cautious self-control of their judgment concerning him. And when, after it had got bruited abroad that the marriage was to take place "very privately, but immediately," Mr. Phillipps disappeared from the ken of that corner of the county, the "folly of Florence Arle and her family" became household words.

For what outsiders said, thought, and sarcastically surmised, Florence cared very little, but about what those with whom she lived and to whom she was the light of

their lives "thought" and did not "say," she was painfully sensitive, keenly, smartingly conscious.

More than five weeks had slipped away since the night when Mr. Phillipps had slunk away without a spoken word of explanation, and though letters full of bright prognostications for the happy future which they would spend together came from him frequently, they failed to infuse a corresponding brightness into the spirit of the girl. She went on her daily way untiringly as she had always done, but the thought, "When shall I see him again? When shall I be sure nothing will part us?" was always present more or less forcibly in her mind.

She was not of that order of womankind who, under any stress of circumstances, can absorb themselves in the question of the material and cut of their clothes. Having once chosen what she wanted and felt would suit her she could not detach her thoughts from every other element in her existence and fix them exclusively upon the effects that would be produced upon her personal appearance when she wore them. Her figure was so supple and slender that to fit her was no trouble, and consequently took very little time, and now that her *trousseau* was ready, tied up with pretty ribbons or effectively disposed on stands and the backs of chairs, as the case might be, she was defrauded of the legitimate pleasure she would have had in the contemplation of it by the haunting thought "Shall I ever wear it? Will he ever come?"

Happily she had the horses still to engross a large portion of her time, and some of her thoughts. The domestic interior was becoming very irksome to her, not that she loved her family less, but because she loved Mr. John Phillipps more, and was not able to put him in a particularly satisfactory light in the family gallery just now. Every time her Uncle Joe, who always unlocked the bag, handed her a letter from her lover, she knew that a question as to "when they were to see Mr. Phillipps himself

again?" was burning on the old man's lips. She was grateful to him for the small mercy of refraining from wording it, but her quick sympathetic soul understood the strain of mingled jealous feeling for her, and tenderness for her anxiety, which kept him silent.

Unfortunately, too, for her temporary peace, her father's memory had grown capricious. There were many days during which he never thought of Mr. Phillipps at all—days when that strongly painted figure was utterly obliterated from the canvas of the poor, failing, suffering artist's mind. But there were other days when it stood out in abnormally strong relief. On these occasions the questions he asked emphasised and accentuated all Florence's hardly stifled fears and exasperating conjectures. The majority of these Mrs. Arle cleverly caught and parried before they struck Florence, but many of them struck straight into that part of our nervous organisation which we call our heart, and made her wince and ache over the knowledge of her inability to answer them.

"Business! business! Always business!" Mr. Arle would say, fretfully. "If I were a little stronger I would go up to Town and see what sort of 'business' was keeping the man from the performance of an obvious duty."

"My dear! don't speak of him as the man," Florence's mother would plead.

"I can hardly think of him as one, I can tell you that; what right had he to come and destroy my daughter's happiness in the life here unless he meant to secure it with himself? He is trading on my miserable helplessness; the coward!" Then the consideration of his own miserable helplessness would become the paramount one in Mr. Arle's mind, and for a few days Mr. Phillipps would be entirely forgotten.

With her mother Florence had no trouble. The good-looking, clever, distinguished man had conquered the mother as completely as he had the daughter. There was

nothing suspicious to the guileless lady in the circumstance of his being absent in an unexplained way when he ought to have been present as Florence's bridegroom. "The City was a wonderful place, she had always heard, and men in a large way of busines were often not the masters of their own time and actions." So she would speak comfortingly to her daughter, and against her judgment and her instincts the daughter was sometimes comforted.

That his letters were always written from his club, and that, therefore, he was still in London, was also a source of a certain faint feeling of satisfaction to Florence. It seemed to her inexperience that it must always be possible to put one's hand on a business man in London. He had never told her what he was, but she understood that he was a sort of merchant prince, and she took if for granted that the name of John Phillipps, of *such* a John Phillipps as he was, was as widely known and easily recognised as that of the Lord Mayor. The fact of his trading under another name than his own had never entered her mind. Accordingly the house of "*Hornbeam* and *Hauting*" was quite secure from all possibility of invasion from any member of the family of the latest victim of its senior partner.

For a time Florence kept away even from Mrs. Broadhurst, for she felt intuitively that Mrs. Broadhurst had changed in her feelings towards Mr. Phillipps. Then there came a day when she reflected that by keeping apart from her old friend she was betraying a cowardly fear of what that old friend might have to say on the subject that was, of course, omnipotent with the girl herself. "How silly I was," she thought, "he's not all the world to her, very likely she has forgotten that it's just five weeks now since John had to go off in such a hurry. Besides he has good reasons for not coming; the more business he gets through now before we're married, the freer he will be after, and the more I shall see of him."

This last view of the case had never been put before her by Mr. Phillipps, it may be mentioned, for he was conscious that he would need to apply himself as closely to business after as before his marriage with Florence, if he wanted to keep Violet unsuspicious and quiescent. The suggestion was an airy emanation of Mrs. Arle's motherly brain, and Florence clung to and cherished it, and caused it to account for many things.

Spring flowers were just pushing themselves above the earth in groups of yellow and purple crocuses, daffodils, and waxen hyacinths, when Florence made her way over to the Broadhursts. Mouldering leaves had been rustling on the ground when John Phillipps went away ; and now all signs of decay were swept away, and the fresh young life of the earliest spring flowers filled the atmosphere with vitality. The sight of them pointed the length of time that had elapsed between then and now more keenly than anything else had done. The sight, the smell, the sensation of them overcame her, and as she rode up the long drive between lines of them, the tears gathered hot and fast, and fell in big drops from her eyes.

"What a fool I am ! What a fool I am !" she thought, as she wiped them angrily away, feeling awkwardly conscious that the servant would see traces of and wonder about them when he opened the door to her. It was too late to retreat, the bell was rung, her horse was led away, and she was taken straight into a room full of people before she could recover herself.

"Flo ! is anything the matter, my child ?" The words sprang to Mrs. Broadhurst's lips, and were spoken eagerly and thoughtlessly before she remembered that they were as ill-adapted to the office of welcome as could well have been conceived. Her kind, womanly heart had told her often during the last few weeks that there was much the matter that would probably never be mended about the Phillipps and Arle affair. She was a careless and impul-

sive woman in many ways, but where the feelings and dignity of any woman or girl for whom she professed friendship were concerned her discretion and reticence were unassailable. Accordingly, though she had often found herself one of the numerous groups in which Florence Arle and her family were alternately pitied, blamed and sneered at, Mrs. Broadhurst always contrived to evade offering any information, or even an opinion, on the subject. That she had not thought about it frequently and anxiously cannot be affirmed.

So now, when Florence's tear-stained, wistful face wrung the words "Flo! is anything the matter, my child?" from her old friend, the girl was far less annoyed and embarrassed by hearing them than that old friend herself for having uttered them.

"I don't know why I should have asked that unless it is that I always think you ought to come to luncheon instead of only in the middle of the afternoon," she continued, bustling about among the large dogs and little tables which were scattered all over the floors. "Sit down there by the violet-table, and when I've given you some tea and cakes, you shall tell me about your mother and the gee's."

"Perhaps Miss Arle has something more interesting to tell you about herself," one of the company bleated softly. She was a puffy-faced woman with a faint, uncalled-for smile on her cheeks—a smile which failed either to enlighten her eyes or soften her mouth. On the strength of this smile Mrs. Gunton, the vicar's wife, passed for an amiable woman, and because of the long-sustained plaintive notes which she produced when wording any damaging or disagreeable suggestions about any one of her numerous acquaintances she was popularly believed to be both pious and good-hearted.

Therefore, now, when she made her little speech at Miss Arle, everyone in the room remembered that Miss Arle

had a lover who was showing himself a laggard. And each one felt—though she individually would have shrunk from applying a caustic finger to the wound—that Mrs. Gunton did no more than was humanly just in reminding Miss Arle that she had been a little over-ambitious, and that her soaring wings had been very properly clipped. The arrow pointed with ill-nature missed its aim. In genuine unconsciousness of its having been let fly at her, Florence was beginning to say that she had nothing interesting to tell of herself, when kindly feeling stepped in and did what motiveless spite had failed to achieve—broke her down, namely——

"Don't mind her little sneers, Flo!" Mrs. Broadhurst whispered, under cover of giving her some cake. "She's only trying to find out." Then Florence knew that her story was common gossip, and matter of common speculation, and that her unhappiness was not a secret sacred to herself.

CHAPTER XIV.

JACK INTERVENES.

An intense and strictly justifiable pleasure may illumine the hearts of all those who are sufficiently interested in the people passing through these pages to dislike Phillipps-Twysden, and desire that he should be punished for his evil courses. Perhaps at this juncture he was being punished as severely as any but the most vindictive-minded could wish. He was being made to suffer in both his best and worst affections, for the child whom he really loved was ill, and the woman he ought not to have worshipped was apart from him, sorrowing bitterly for his absence, an absence which he dare not explain to her, and which without his explanation was a painful mystery to her.

Up to a certain point everything had gone well—that is, as he wished it to go with him. Old Mr. and Miss Twysden had responded with pathetic confidence and warmth to his false apologies and excuses. They were so absolutely sincere in their acceptance of the mendacious explanations he offered, and of his various reasons and motives for not having introduced his wife and son to them before, that he became impregnated with their sentiments and felt a good deal of admiring respect for himself. The line of thought which he cleverly laid down for them to follow was one that must inevitably lead them to utterly erroneous calculations concerning his wife's parents, but that was a detail which did not trouble him at all. Violet was too proud to contradict him even if she found him out, and the old Twysdens were too delicately-minded to let the helpless daughter know how her husband had been almost driven out of society by those defalcations of her father's and Bohemian "goings on" of her mother, to which he alluded more in sorrow than in anger.

Their delicate-minded reticence deepened when they came to see more of Violet and to know her a little better. "You have a perfect woman for your wife, my boy! whatever the sins of her father and mother may be, she is undefiled by them. We can love her as a daughter, and if she and you can make up your minds to spend at least half the year down here, you will be treated as our children, both while we live and when we die."

Phillipps-Twysden grasped the offer and the hand of the man who made it with genuine gratitude. With Violet established at quiet old Houndell for six months at a time, what almost perfect freedom would be his portion. His "business," in its many modern developments, was as much a mystery to old Mr. Twysden as it was to Violet, and on the broad back of that business he could easily lay the burden of his frequent and prolonged absences from wife and home. Accordingly, he felt the gratitude

he expressed, and told Violet that if she betrayed a correspondingly keen sense of the advantages offered, not only their own, but little Jack's fortune was made.

"I would just as soon be here as at Weybridge," she asserted, and in his captious perversity, her easy acquiescence in the arrangements he desired above all things to make annoyed him.

"Just as soon be here as at Weybridge! What an ungracious way of accepting an invitation, and what a suspiciously cool way of relinquishing your home—or rather of showing how ready you are to relinquish it. I recognise your mother's teaching in the scarcely veiled insult to myself."

"Your hatred of mamma makes you childishly unjust, John. She has always counselled me to cling to my home through everything—at any cost of mere feeling."

"Then you have discussed the probability of your leaving it? That's a nice thing for a husband to hear from the lips of a wife upon whom he has lavished every luxury that money can procure! Do you remember that you were a pauper when I married you? and that you would have remained one if I had not been almost Quixotically generous."

"No, I shouldn't have remained one, for I should have married Sir Lionel Halford." She was goaded into making the reply, but it was an injudicious one, as it roused his jealousy against a man about whom he had never condescended to feel it before.

"Perhaps you think that even now, if you cut yourself off from the home and the luxuries I supply you with, Sir Lionel will be ready to make them up to you? Your vanity misleads you if that is the case. He's as much in love with that gaunt specimen of the aristocracy—your friend Lady Susan, as he knows how to be."

"Don't insult me in that way, John! Whatever else you do, don't say things to Jack's mother that may make

her turn on you and tell him that you are unworthy to be his father."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"And don't swear at me," she said, imperiously. "What your secrets are I do not enquire, what your motives are in pretending to me that you are in one place when I meet you in another I will not attempt to discover. But if you dare to hint that I am unfaithful to my marriage vow in thought, I will save my boy from the contaminating influence which might teach him to despise his mother. Do you understand me? or shall I speak more plainly?"

"You needn't." He shrugged his shoulders and spoke with an air of weary contemptuous indifference, but all the time he was thinking she had found out something, and he was fearing her. "I understand you very well, I think, Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden, you want to establish a grievance in order that you may justify any *outrée* action you may choose to take by-and-bye, and you can find none save this, that I spend a portion of my life away from you—working in heavy business chains for that money which you take as your right and spend so freely."

"How I hate the word money! money! money!"

"You'd hate the want of it more, let me tell you. It gets you everything you want—"

"No, John, it *does* not," she interrupted with a sob, that would have wrung his heart to hear had not pride and prejudice and passion for another woman cased that heart in iron against his wife. "It does not give me all I want, I want your love, the love that was so sweet and strong when you *wanted me* that I thought it must last out my life, and I want your confidence. I want, when you are away from me, to be able to tell our child when he says his prayers, to ask God to prosper you in all your doings."

"Don't drag the child into the argument."

"But he must be in it, he is the great link between us, John; if he were left out what would there be left to us of

the lives that we vowed to live together in love and confidence till death should part us. If I have been in fault at all, if the indifference I have sometimes feigned has seemed real to you, forgive me, and believe the truth now, the truth that I have always loved you and longed for your love, and always shall do so. If you will only treat me as a trusted wife should be treated, you shall never hear me repine about the estrangement from my dear father and mother, though Heaven knows I am conscious enough that in being a dutiful wife I shall be an undutiful child."

"That will do," he interrupted coldly; "you contrive to make me feel the sharp edge of your tongue, even while it's uttering words of pretended duty and resignation. It's a painful thing for a husband to say, but I may as well say it, since there is a good deal that is painful in the relations between us—and that is, that your indifference, whether real or feigned, has killed the love I had for you before you displayed it. You asked for my confidence. Now I have given it to you, and I hope you are satisfied."

He spoke more cruelly than he felt, for he wanted at once and for ever to put an end to anything like affectionate pleading on her part, and at the same time he wanted to put her in the wrong. To do this was difficult, but he felt that he had succeeded pretty well when she said:

"Very well! I have said the last words you shall be troubled with from me on the subject. Understand, though, that I am perfectly ready to stay here as long as you please, or go back to Weybridge when it suits you to send me there."

"Touchingly obedient, on my word!" he sneered; "you manage to play the martyr very comfortably. Houndell is a place where even a more fastidious woman than yourself might contrive to exist for a time, and your home at Weybridge is one that even an art-decorator would find it difficult to improve. To be resigned to live in either of them proves you to be an angel of forbearance!"

She looked him straight in the face till he had finished speaking. Then, without a word, she rose and went out of the room. Five minutes afterwards he saw her playing battledore and shuttlecock on the lawn with Jack.

"She's taken the idea of a virtual separation more easily than I expected," he said to himself. "After this she'll never worry me with questions as to where my business takes me. I hope she won't complain to the old people here—that might be awkward."

His spirits rose, and he became quite courteous and agreeable even to his wife for the remainder of that day. He meant to receive a telegram calling him away on urgent business the next morning, and so just for the few intervening hours he thought it would be as well to make as good an impression as possible upon his little boy and the old Twysdens. The latter were both delighted with him. To them he seemed the very model of what a high-minded, hard-working, estimable, honorable English gentleman and British merchant should be. It was sad for him, they felt, that his wife's father and mother should be of that shady Bohemian order of which they had often heard, but of which they knew nothing personally. Still he bore this affliction manfully—"never lets her feel that he smarts under it," the excellent obtuse old brother and sister assured one another. They even went so far in their thorough appreciation of him as to almost bless those false-hearted parents of his who had jilted them both, for having married and produced such a son. And by way of recompensing him for his goodness and unselfishness in accepting their offer of six months' hospitality for himself and his wife and child, they proposed to give a great state dinner party to some of the greatest of the great people in the neighborhood, and introduce him formally as their adopted son and heir.

But even while they were discussing this plan with him, and he was affecting to fall in and be interested in it, he

was arranging in his own mind his plan of campaign with Florence for the next three or four months, and thinking that "to-morrow he would see her—his innocent darling!" again.

He was alone with Mr. and Miss Twysden at this moment. Violet had gone up after dinner to see Jack after his bath, according to her invariable custom, and at last someone remarked that "she was away longer than usual." Presently after this a note was brought from her to Miss Twysden.

"Please send for a doctor at once; my boy is very ill. —Violet."

There was confusion and excitement in the house for hours after this, and during it Phillipps-Twysden found himself alone with his wife by the bedside of their child. The doctor had come, and pronounced the sudden illness to be "whooping-cough, with complications." The little fellow was feverish, and his labored painful breathing wrung his mother's heart as she stood by watching each change in the little pain-swollen face. Suddenly her husband spoke:

"Will he die, Violet? Am I to lose my boy?"

"God forbid—unless he lets me die too!" she moaned as she sank on her knees and prayed that the light of her life might not be taken from her. She made no attempt to draw him down to pray with her, and he noticed the omission and was nettled by it, "for the boy is mine as well as hers!" he reminded himself jealously, and something pricked his heart till the pain made his eyelids wet.

All through that night—and for many a weary day and night after it—little Jack tossed and moaned and wasted away under the combined influences of fever, whooping-cough, and inflammation of the lungs. Now and then Hope lit her bright beacon fire in Violet's heart. But, as a rule, what she had to fight against and conceal from the suffering child was a dull despair that seemed to paralyse

her! Each minute her boy grew dearer to her, and each minute seemed to lessen the chances of her keeping him with her.

"It is more than I can bear, it is more than I can bear!" she would wail under her breath, when Jack was sleeping a sleep that looked so like death already, that for a moment of terror she thought the end had come. Then, perhaps, he would wake a little refreshed, and looking her living child again, and all her other troubles melted away and were forgotten in her gratitude to God for having spared her this mightiest one of all.

While little Jack was hanging in the balance, his father was chained to Houndell. The unconscious girl who had ousted his wife from his heart had not weakened his child's hold upon that—"that deceitful and desperately wicked" —organ. There were many days, indeed, when it became positively irksome to him to write those letters to Florence which were necessary to keep her faith in him alive. These letters gave him a good deal of trouble in the posting as well as in the composing, for they had to be posted in London, and this involved his trusting someone to a certain extent. This someone he had selected for the post of partially-trusted one was a deserving but impecunious widow lady, whose son was a junior clerk in the house of Hornbeam and Hauting, and who only knew Mr. Phillipps-Twysden as Hornbeam, the great head of the house. He paid her liberally for posting his letters to Florence Arle, and holding her tongue about it to all men—even to her son. She was an unsuspicious woman, and thought no evil of dignitaries, and she was a prudent woman who, for her own son's sake, desired to make a little money and stand well with the head of the house. Therefore she posted the letters unfailingly, and observed a golden silence about them. Nevertheless, she hoped that when the little romance ended in matrimony, and Miss Arle had become the great man's wife, she would re-

member that humble instrument in their courtship—the letter-poster, Mrs. Watts.

One morning Jack took the turn that they had been waiting for in trembling anguish and heart sickening suspense for many weeks, and he took it in the right direction. His mother's prayers had been heard, and he was better!

At once the heavy cloud was lifted from the house. The old master and mistress, who had gone about with dim tearful eyes and hushed steps lately, shook each other's hands, and prophesied to each other concerning all the treats and changes and presents they would give to the little chap who had so nearly left them. Violet forgot all her fatigue and soul weariness, and was once more the bright happy young mother whom Jack remembered before his illness.

And Phillipps-Twysden went up to town, for the first time since he came down to Houndell, on business.

After spending two or three hours at his office he went to his club, and heard that a gentleman had been there for the last three or four days enquiring for Mr. Phillipps, and had left his card. The card was handed to him and he was reading the name printed in portly letters upon it as Mr. Joseph Cadly, when he heard himself addressed as Mr. Phillipps; and looking round he found himself confronted by Florence's Uncle Joe.

CHAPTER XV.

UNCLE JOE INTERVENES.

THE impulse to knock Mr. Cadly down was so strongly upon Phillipps-Twysden that he deserved some credit for the self-control which enabled him instead to hold out his hand and say, heartily:

"I'm delighted to see you, when did you come up? Come along and have some luncheon."

"I'm not delighted to see you, Mr. Phillipps," Uncle Joe spoke in subdued tones that seemed of revolting coarseness to Phillipps-Twysden, and stuck his hand into the pocket of his coat instead of placing it with friendly and confiding warmth into the one extended to him. I am not delighted to see you, Mr. Phillipps, and I'll not break bread with you till you've made it clear to me that you're running straight."

"Come along, we'll go somewhere else where I can explain things; not here, there's no privacy in this confounded place."

"I don't want privacy, I want an open, manly understanding with you," Uncle Joe rejoined in jerks, for he was being hustled along by his companion, to whom anything approaching to a scene at his Club would have been an intolerable nuisance, to say nothing of the scene probably exploding the secret of his real name and surroundings.

"You shall have everything you want in five minutes if you'll only come along, and not make a row." Then he hailed a hansom, hoisted the unwilling old man into it, and had himself and his captive "accuser" or "pursuer," or whatever else Uncle Joe might develop into, driven to one of Spiers and Pond's *restaurants*, the one where he was least likely to be seen of all men while in bondage to the "old country bumpkin," as he mentally designated Uncle Joe. Here, as soon as they were seated and luncheon served to them, Mr. Phillipps-Twysden recovered his equanimity and proceeded with much calm ingenuity to throw dust into Uncle Joe's honest eyes.

"I had just been reading a letter from Flo, in which she gives me all the home news; she didn't tell me, though, that I was to have the pleasure of seeing you up here, so I was rather startled when you spoke to me."

"You looked startled, Mr. Phillipps," Uncle Joe said slowly. "You looked as I've seen a man look when there's a big, ugly fence in front of him that he knows he

can't avoid, and he's not sure of either his horse or himself. That's how you looked, Mr. Phillipps, and I was sorry to see it."

"In other words, you mean that I looked frightened, my good friend?" There was anything but a sweet smile on his face as he spoke—a tiger might regard the one who was looking after the interests of a lamb which the tiger wanted with a similar expression. "Well!" he went on lightly, as the old man shook his head and declined the sherry offered to him, "you'll find there's not much cowardice about me, though I did allow myself to be staggered for a moment at your unexpected appearance. However, that's over, and I'm delighted to see you. Have you any plans for to-night? If not, we might go to the theatre together, and to-morrow, if you've done your business, we could go down together."

"I have plans for this evening, and for all the time I'm in London, Mr. Phillipps, and they are to find out all I can about you. I tell you this honestly and openly, sir. I owe it to my sister and my sister's child to do for them what the poor afflicted husband and father can't do. My 'business' will be over at once, sir, if you tell me where you live, and how you live, and why you're known at your Club by one name and to us by another. When I asked for Mr. Phillipps they didn't know you—those Club servants; but when I described you they said at once 'twas Mr. Phillipps-Twysden that I meant! You'll understand that I want to know the right name of the man who is going to marry my niece."

"Do you suppose my occupation to be that of a body-snatcher or a burglar that you want to pry into my business, Mr. Cadly? I can assure you that I have no intention of gratifying any impertinent intrusive curiosity that you may choose to feel and show about my affairs. It is my whim to keep the business and prosaic side of my life quite apart from the private and domestic one. I am

not a man much given to sentiment, but I have this much of it in me, I want to surround Florence with an atmosphere of perfect peace and incalculable simplicity and beauty. Such a life can never be lived if sordid cares and anxious business thoughts are introduced into it. Florence understands this thoroughly, and will not thank you for trying to force me to break a compact that she and I made for our mutual happiness—entirely to her satisfaction."

"She's an innocent girl, and you've persuaded her, Mr. Phillipps; it's not to my satisfaction that we should be as much in the dark about you as if you had dropped from the stars."

"Then as to the name of Twysden," Mr. Phillipps went on as airily as if he were not one whit concerned about the name, and had forgotten that boy of his who bore it, "as to the name of 'Twysden,' they tack it on to Phillipps sometimes because some of my mother's people were called 'Twysden,' and they think I am proud of it."

"You may well be; it's a rare good name in Somersetshire," Uncle Joe put in thoughtfully. "I know the family—known 'em years ago; had dealings with the Twysdens, to be sure I had! Why, I got the finest brood mare that ever stepped into my yard from Squire Twysden, of Houndell!"

"The devil you did! I mean theyr'e not the same family from which my mother came. The Twysdens I hail from remotely have a fastness somewhere in the West of Ireland. If you'd like to look them up."

He was speaking gaily, it seemed to him such an excellent joke that he should send this intrusive old person off on a wild goose chase to the West of Ireland in search of some imaginary Twysdens who had never existed there, when his gaiety received a shock. Sir Lionel Halford was passing, and catching sight of little Jack's father, he stopped in real kindheartedness and

genuine pleasure, to express his feelings about the little boy's recovery.

"Glad to see you, Twysden, and awfully glad of the news Lady Susan has wired to me that the boy's better. I shall run down to the Duke's for a day or two soon, and call at Hound——"

"They'll be glad to see you, every one of them. Lady Susan is the best creature in the world. She doesn't like me. Don't tell her I said so," Phillipps-Twysden rattled out, feeling guiltily that Uncle Joe's eyes were upon him, sternly observant of his impatience and embarrassment. "By the way, I want a word with you about——" he muttered something which Mr. Cadly could not hear, and jumping up caught Sir Lionel by the arm and led him aside, apparently talking business earnestly.

"I couldn't introduce you," he explained presently, coming back to the rather bewildered old yeoman, "that fellow is possessed of more money than brains, and I'm trying to save the former for him. He wants to take a theatre——"

"He should engage you to act in it—you play a double part well," the old man interrupted, with sudden fury; "in all London there must be someone to tell me the truth about you—the truth! which I shall never get from yourself."

He had picked his hat up with a shaking hand and was going away out of the place that was crowded with his fellow creatures, not one of whom he felt he could trust; not one of whom could or would give him any information upon which he could rely about this man who wanted to marry his niece. Phillipps-Twysden was following him, expostulating glibly, for it would be unpleasant if Uncle Joe should be able to offer such a fair show of condemnation of his, Phillipps', conduct that Florence should be tempted to look at it.

"What misconception are you nourishing now, Mr.

Cadly?" he was asking with tolerance and a pretence of subdued amusement; "it's not possible that you can be annoyed because I left you for a moment to speak to a man you don't know?"

"I'm not annoyed." Uncle Joe spoke sadly but softly. The sadness of the tones didn't impress Phillipps-Twysden at all, but he was pleased that the old man was considerate enough to suppress them, for they were in Fleet Street now, where at any moment he might run across a city acquaintance, "I'm not annoyed, Mr. Twysden, but I'm sorry to find the man who wants to marry my Flo is ashamed or afraid to let a man who *knows him* speak before me. You're not riding fair, sir."

A fine, handsome, matronly woman, stepping firmly along, as one who has matter in hand, the righteousness of which excuses her presence alone in any place, was meeting them at this moment. She stopped abruptly, her color rose and something like tears started to her eyes as she half held out her hand to Phillipps-Twysden, saying:

"John, I must tell you how rejoiced I am; I am his grandmother, you know! Violet has telegraphed to me that our boy is better." He raised his hat stiffly, let her proffered hand remain extended unnoticed, and murmuring that he "was delighted to hear the cause of her gratification," passed on with an outward appearance of cold unconcern and an inner consciousness of profound humiliation, dread and misery. Was he not being punished already? Was he not taking out a portion of his hell upon earth? in being compelled through his own crooked policy to disown the one being whom he loved truly, and, to a certain extent, purely! his son.

"By all the agony I've gone through, while the little lad was hanging between life and death, God forgive me for seeming to be careless of him now," he pleaded inwardly in what he intended to be a prayerful spirit. Then he

set himself again to the unpalatable task of "squaring Uncle Joe," who was trudging along in indignant silence and brain-aching bewilderment.

"That lady has been in great anxiety about her little grandchild. I know its parents and——"

"I should suppose you *did* know 'its parents' pretty well, Mr. Phillipps, or Twysden, or whatever name you wish to be called by," Uncle Joe replied drily; "both the young fool, with more money than brains, who wants to take a theatre, and the grandmother seemed to think you had as strong an interest as any of them in the boy! Tell me what that interest is, and let me feel that I'm dealing with a man."

"The pure country air and unsophisticated country surroundings breed a good deal of ungrounded suspicion, I observe." Mr. Phillipps-Twysden was forgetting Florence for a moment, and permitting himself the luxury of sneering at her powerful old relative. In another moment, the vision of Florence, in all her fresh unstained youth and prettiness, in all her honest heart-whole belief in and love for him, flashed itself before him, invigorating his memory, steadying his nerves, and impelling him to say words that the best disposed recording angel would hesitate to attempt to blot out.

"The interest I feel in the boy can never clash with those nearer and dearer interests of my own to which I look forward with confidence. I had a brother, the brother sinned and suffered! and—died! His child is innocent, and I am fond of him—fond of the boy, you understand," he went on, stammering. "But he won't come into Florence's life. I shall provide for him, but I don't want to bring his—his father's unfortunate story under Florence's notice." Then by a great eflort he added—

"His father was a scoundrel! Florence must never hear of him. Ah! Mr. Cadly, there are skeletons in every

house! Mine is an ugly one, but you have forced me to show it to you, are you satisfied? You have beaten me, you have discovered my secret!"

"It does you credit." Mr. Cadly did not say these words effusively at all, but with an ironically admiring air that left his hearer a little in doubt as to "what" did him credit.

"It does you credit to think you should have such fine feelings for a scoundrel brother, and what an uncle you must have proved yourself for those two people to take it for granted that you'd be the one most interested in the boy. Your brother's widow (if he's left one) must almost worship you. Now I should like to see that lady."

"My brother's widow is a person with whom I can *never* allow Flo to hold any communication."

"A loose character, eh? if she's that it seems to me that your duty to your dead brother, though he may have been a scoundrel, bids you remove the boy from her care. Is there anything about the boy's mother that unfits her to know my niece?"

"You ask too much, Mr. Cadly, you presume too much upon your age and my affection for your niece. I have told you all you will ever learn from me of a most unfortunate piece of family history. If you pry about and seek to get further information in a mean and underhand way I shall feel it my duty to remove Florence from your influence altogether, and forbid her to hold any intercourse with you."

"She wouldn't obey you," the old man almost shouted in his wrath. "My little girl has known and loved me too long to turn round and sting me at your command; she wouldn't obey you if you told her to give me up—she loves me too well."

"Pooh! she loves me better. Do you suppose that she's the *one* woman in the world who will cling to a prejudiced old relation to the ruin of her whole happiness

and the happiness of the man she loves? My good sir, you know little indeed of the human heart and of feminine nature if you delude yourself with such a groundless belief. Florence will be sorry to be separated from you, I own that frankly, but she will submit to the separation if I tell her that I wish it. I tell you fairly that if you cross swords with me, Florence will put her hand on the hilt of mine to help me! yes, even though she knows it will go through your heart."

He spoke with savage sincerity. Uncle Joe was seeing a bit of the real man at last! They had come up through the Strand into Waterloo Place by this time. An Oxford Street omnibus was passing, on the top of which Major Noel was seated. He did not see either of the two men who knew him, but the quick eyes of the old Devonshire colt breeder, who never forgot a point either in horse or man, recognized him.

"You'll do your worst with her—if ever you get her. We may as well part now. I'll take that 'bus," Uncle Joe said briefly. In another moment he had clambered to the top, and taken his seat by Major Noel, while Phillipps-Twysden walked on briskly, burning with impatience and annoyance alone.

"I'll take the first train I can catch and forestall that meddling old miscreant," he decided. So Violet received a telegram that day telling her that business had taken him abroad, and by five o'clock he was in a train that was bound for the west country.

CHAPTER XVI.

FLORENCE ARLE'S FIRST DOUBTS.

It was all peace and pure sunshine in the Arle household the day of Mr. Phillipps' return. He came down determined to take captive the faith and affections of the family

before Uncle Joe came back, and brought his pernicious policy of prudence and suspicion to bear upon the hitherto prosperous lover.

The coming of this lover was so unexpected that Florence was not there to receive him; but, though he showed very proper signs of disappointment at this, he made the old people feel that the sight of them was the next best pleasure his eyes could have had to the sight of Florence. He told them quite a long story of the hard brain work and hard travelling work he had been obliged to get through during his absence, in order that he might have more to devote to his young wife for a while after their marriage. "And at the last, just when I had cleared off every pressing score, and was on the point of coming back to you all, who should I meet but Uncle Joe, full of bitter wrath against me because I hadn't put him in possession of a host of business matters that merely concern the house of which I am a partner. I wanted him to come down with me, but he cast my invitation aside with ever-so-many threats, and went off avowing that he'd find out something bad about me."

"Dear! dear! It's not like Joe to interfere and make mischief," Mrs. Arle sighed; "but he's always been foolish about Flo, thinking no one good enough for her!"

"I admit that at once; but I venture to think I'm the most deserving fellow who has ever wanted her. I must be, you see, or she wouldn't have chosen me," he went on, pleasantly taking Mrs. Arle's acquiescence for granted in a way that flattered her into feeling. "He knows—I thoroughly understand him!"

"London life always upsets Joe a little," Mr. Cadly's sister explained. "It's the whizz and the smoke, you know, and so many streets all looking very much alike to people who do not know them as *we* do, Mr. Phillipps."

"Exactly, exactly; that no doubt accounts for a little wildness in his eye and manner. In fact, he said such

extraordinary things to me that if it hadn't been too early in the day I should have thought the dear old chap had been drinking."

"*That* he never does, never, Mr. Phillipps! I have never known my brother Joe drink a drop in his life."

"Extraordinary case—and how thirsty he must be by this time; I think you might pay me the compliment of taking me into the family to the extent of calling me John. By the way, dear old Uncle Joe was supremely funny about a sort of nick-name I have among a certain set in town, and which he chanced to get hold of. He seemed to think that I was dealing treacherously with Flo in not having told her of it."

He laughed so heartily at this that Mrs. Arle, though she did not exactly see the joke, laughed too, and said:

"Poor old Joe!" in accents of affectionate contempt. Presently she thought she would like to hear what her son-in-law's nick-name was. But by the time she had asked that he had swung himself into another topic, and did not think it necessary to answer. But Mrs. Arle forgave the discourtesy, or rather did not notice it, for "John," as she hastened to call him mentally, was eloquently pleading for an early wedding-day to be fixed.

"I shall get a special license, so there will be no tedious delay if Flo is only ready. The precautions with which a marriage by banns are encompassed always seem to me idiotic; don't they strike you in the same way?"

"Well, I'll hardly say *that*," Mrs. Arle said guardedly. "I like the idea of the word being asked if it knows just cause or impediment why these two should not be joined together in 'Holy Matrimony' three Sundays running."

"My dear lady! the world would always find a thousand just causes and impediments if it pleased. Moreover, it isn't the world at all that's consulted on the subject, it's a miserable handful of people in a village

church. It would be so in our case, and the only impediment they'd think of to my union with Flo would be couched in these words, 'we don't know un,' applied to me."

Mrs. Arle missed the joke, if he designed to make one, and suggested yet another slight drawback to the plan he proposed.

"A special license is so expensive."

"Dear Mrs. Arle, where Florence is concerned I shall never be economical. Your daughter will be the great extravagance of my life, and I shall never grudge paying anything that she may cost me—never grudge it, and *never* regret it!"

He was speaking strangely, Mrs. Arle thought—speaking more seriously and earnestly than the subject seemed to warrant. The fact is he was speaking partly to himself—following out a train of thought of which she knew nothing. If she had been suspicious of him, or critically disposed, she might have been rendered uneasy by the display of feverish haste which he was making to be married to her daughter. But she was a woman who had tasted the dregs of the cup of poverty herself, and recalling the flavor of those dregs as she listened to him, she felt more inclined to urge him on to the fulfilment of his generous intentions towards Florence than to carpingly enquire as to the reason why he was in such a hurry.

"You know your own affairs best, I am sure of that, John!" she said with a little timid, adoring, admiring emphasis on his name that was eloquent in its satisfied trustfulness. "If you like to have a wedding without any of our friends being present, Florence will like it, too, I'm sure, and I shall raise no objection. Though, of course, as a mother I feel that I should like my daughter to be seen that day—she'll be such a pretty bride; all in white, dear child; for I'm sure you won't encourage the foolish notion of being married in her habit and riding straight from the church?"

"By Jove! but that plan has its advantages! Why not, Mrs. Arle? Think of how much trouble you would be saved! and remember that she'll be as pretty in her riding habit as in the conventional white satin. Say yes, and I'll run up to Exeter and get a license to-morrow!"

"If my brother Joe were at home I'd say yes, directly," Mrs. Arle assented nervously, "but in his absence—this is his house, you know, and there would be so much talk about it in the neighborhood! Why, no show wedding that could be arranged would make half as much gossip, Mr. Phillipps—John, I mean. It would be the nine-days' wonder, and ill-natured people would go so far as to say it was shoppy. Old Joe Cadly's niece mustn't do anything out of the way. When she's *your wife* it will be different."

"Very different—widely different," he interrupted, marvelling at himself for that development of the power of self-control which enabled him to go through these obnoxious preliminaries. He was a man of might in the City, in his own beautiful home he was an autocrat, and in the social circle that knew him best, that circle into which he stepped with a firm step, and in which he had taken his place with stern self-assertion since his marriage with Violet, he was a respected, feared man. Yet being these things, and knowing that he was these things, he found himself here in a remote west-country hamlet waiting on a feeble old woman's words of weak wisdom with patience, and trembling at the possible dictum of an inexperienced country girl. It was a ridiculous, incongruous position for such a man as he knew himself to be to be placed in. But he had placed himself in it with cunning consideration, and now he would abide the consequences.

It was only when he thought of little Jack, his loving little son, who was only just creeping back from the gates of death, that his vicious strength gave way a little, and his selfish, immoral, passionate purpose grew infirm.

But it was an infirmity that did not prove fatal to the purpose. Perhaps it might have done so if Jack had relapsed into dangerous illness at this juncture, but no news of this kind reaching him, he strove to think as little of the household at Houndell as possible.

It was not difficult to banish unpleasant memories, presently, when hearing the horses' feet clattering up the yard, he went out and met Florence. At the first glance he saw that the girl had lost that soft fresh beautiful bloom of youth which had struck him with such attractive force when first he met her. It was not exactly that she had grown either paler or thinner, but she had lost something in the tone of her complexion and in the lines of her face and form. This "something" is not to be defined, it belongs exclusively to heart-free, happy, unanxious youth and from whatever cause it vanishes, it never returns again. Some shadow of the chagrin—it can hardly be called sorrow—which he felt that she should have changed in the slightest degree must have shown itself in his face as he met her, for her serious contemplative look changed to one of absolute nervousness.

"Is anything the matter, John?" she asked. "Oh, I'm so glad you are back, so glad! so glad! Are you not glad too?"

She had sprung from her horse, and now they stood inside the passage door, out of sight of the grooms, who would have been irreverently amused at the touch of human nature had they witnessed it. For Florence's arms were round his neck, and he was raining kisses on the wistful face that was lifted up to meet them.

"You have missed me, my darling?"

"Missed you! That I should have done under any circumstances, but I've done more than miss you, I have been miserable, because when people insinuated things and looked things that they wouldn't have dared to say, I've had to be silent, I couldn't tell them where you were, or

what you were doing, or even when you were coming back. And so I've been miserable."

"Because other people have doubted me?"

She clung closer to him, and made no answer. But he felt that the moment for beginning her education had come. Putting his hand under her chin he raised her face and forced her to meet his eyes.

"Were you 'miserable' because other people doubted me?"

"A little."

"You were foolish, my dear girl, foolish and—forgive me!—not quite loyal. You must learn to be more reliant on your own judgment of me, for I can't suppose for a moment that you have dishonored me by doubting the integrity of my conduct in staying away from you at the command of duty!"

"If to be anxious and miserable, and full of wild conjectures about what kept you away was 'dishonoring to you,' I am guilty," she said quickly, and—he was sorry to see—fearlessly.

"I thought you were superior to the folly of being at the mercy of other people's doubts," he said, with a pretence of being relieved. "After all, it was only your own loving fears for me which made you so miserable, and, egotist that I am, where you are concerned, I can't feel anything but flattered by your fears and little idle miseries."

He would not say anything about her "doubts." He judged it better to leave them uncanvassed.

And in his presence they quickly took their departure from Florence's mind, and dispersed. To have him there!—safely in her own home, behaving like a son already to her father and mother, and earnestly urging them all to consent to an immediate quiet marriage was quite enough for her.

"Mrs. Gunton will find that she has wasted her shot!

How I should like to hear her purr upon John when she hears the wedding-day is fixed. She'll offer to decorate the church, and tell people that she 'liked Mr. Phillipps, from the first.' She always does that when a girl she knows marries a man who's well-off, and may perhaps invite Mrs. Gunton to stay with them."

These thoughts, or some that were near akin to them, flashed through Florence's mind as she glanced over a note from Mrs. Gunton a little later in the day.

"THE VICARAGE, Thursday, April 10th.

"MY DEAR FLORENCE,—Do come to tennis to-morrow at three. Mrs. Broadhurst says she will call for you. Someone who *very much wants* to meet you will be here. It is no use my saying I shall be happy to see Mr. Phillipps, as I hear his return is still uncertain.

"Yours affectionately,

"LETTIE GUNTON."

"The sting of this little epistolary reptile is in its tail, I observe," Mr. Phillipps remarked when Florence handed him the note. "Never mind, Flo, if you'll take me I'll go and make myself agreeable to the fellow, who very much wants to meet you, for, of course, it's a fellow, and equally of course, it's a back-number whom you've suppressed."

"But I haven't any back-numbers," Florence said delightedly, for the idea of his going with her and so by his grand bodily presence refuting all those vague chimerical aspersions which had been thought and spoken about him, charmed her into light-heartedness. "We will go there together, and the person who wants to meet me shall have the unexpected pleasure of meeting you too, John."

"I do think Mrs. Gunton ought to be asked to the wedding if no one else is," Mrs. Arle put in parenthetically. "She's always been so nice and friendly, taking such an interest in Florence from a child. Over and over again she has told me how anxious she had been that

Florence shouldn't break her back with those colts, or be spoken about. I think we must make an exception in her favor, and ask her to the wedding."

"I don't want anyone but Mrs. Broadhurst," Florence said stonily, untouched by those instances of Mrs. Gunton's friendly feelings which had been brought into evidence.

"And I don't want anyone but you," Mr. Phillipps whispered, and for once he spoke the truth.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. GUNTON SURMOUNTS A DIFFICULTY.

MRS. GUNTON had several difficulties to combat when she promised to give a tennis party. In the first place she lived in an inaccessible place, or at least in a place that was pronounced to be "inaccessible" by the people whom she most desired to entertain. All the best people whom she knew—that is all the best-off and most entertaining and most thoroughly "established" people—lived just far enough away for them to be able to plead "distance" as a deterrent when she invited them. "They must spend half the day on the road in going to and getting away from her," they said. Then they would politely lament that she lived so far from a railway station, and there the matter would end. It sometimes struck her as odd that though she lived at the same distance from these people that they did from her, yet she never found their houses "inaccessible" when they asked her to dinner or tennis, though she had only one litttle pony and a small open trap to match it, while the majority of her acquaintances possessed horses and close carriages.

But on this special occasion she had faced her difficulties, fought, and vanquished them creditably. In the first place the weather was in her favor. It was an early

genial spring, dry and warm—such a spring as the old people were accustomed to in "the forties." There was a good expanse of soft hazy blue in the sky; the wind was from the indulgent west. Light frocks and flannel suits looked quite seasonable. It was rumored, by those who knew, that the Vicarage Tennis Courts, which were generally boggy, were for once in excellent order. But beyond these inducements Mrs. Gunton held out another that was even more seductive. She had got it to be understood—published it as a sort of open secret—that those who came to her tennis party would have the pleasure of seeing that "poor, pretty Miss Arle, who had just been so *horribly* treated by that man about whom nothing was known down here." This rumor reached the ears of many men who had admired and liked Florence Arle, and who were rather glad of the opportunity of meeting her unfettered by the presence of the man about whom no one knew anything save that "he seemed to be a very decent fellow, with plenty of tin." It also reached the ears of many women, old and young, who neither admired nor liked Florence Arle, but who were also extremely glad of the opportunity of meeting Florence Arle in this her hour of humiliation. These two diverse interests which were felt in her were the chief factors in the success of Mrs. Gunton's tennis party.

It was rather a manipulation of a fact on Mrs. Gunton's part when she asserted that there was some one coming who much wished to meet the girl. The person to whom she attributed this very natural desire was unconscious of it himself, that is, he was quite unconscious of Miss Arle's personality, and had only been led into saying he "should like to see her" by the necessity of saying something, after having listened for ten minutes at a dinner-party to what his neighbor Mrs. Gunton was telling him of the way in which "a girl was being justly punished for the forward and almost immodest way in which she had hunted a man

who was supposed to be a good match, and who was, at any rate, in an immeasurably superior station to the aforesaid girl." That sort of conduct is *so* unwomanly, and *so* general, as you, being a man of such rank and position, have found out probably," she had purred gently. And the man she addressed had stared slightly at this novel champion of her sex's dignity and replied :

"No, indeed ! never experienced the flattering treatment myself. I should like to see the lady who has paid a man such a compliment."

"Oh, I'm sure you're joking ; but if you'll come to a tennis-party I'm giving on Friday (she only made up her mind to give it as she spoke) you shall see her. I'm very fond of her myself, she's *quite* one of my young favorites—though not *quite*, you understand—not *quite* in the class in which I should choose to move if I were not circumscribed by circumstances. A clergyman's wife, you know, *has* her duties, and I always try to do mine." She paused and smiled at him, she was still young enough to hope that when she posed as a social martyr to a young man, he might find her attractive enough to expend a little pity, blended with admiration, upon her. But this young man was very dense. He either did not see what was expected of him, or the attractions failed to make themselves manifest to him.

"Everybody has duties, but I'm afraid we don't all make your laudable efforts to do them," he answered absently ; "obtusely," Mrs. Gunton thought, in her mortification at having failed to win him to regard her as a garden-flower transplanted to the wilds. She blamed herself for having been too "local" in her conversation. Accordingly she made the mistake of quitting the pastures whereon she was accustomed to browse, and flung herself with heroic, but fatuous recklessness into topics of which she knew less than the most untutored London street arab.

"You must find it very dull down here away from the

theatres and—and things?" She hazarded the remark sympathetically, and felt both silly and chilled when he first cut the ground from under her feet by saying that "he hardly ever went to theatres," and then proceeded to bewilder her by speaking of a number of the latest and current events in the theatrical and dramatic world, as if she ought to be so thoroughly conversant with them as to be able to catch his swiftest balls and throw them back. It would have been better to have let him think her "local," she felt, as she sat and listened with the hopeless smile of non-comprehension on her face, and tingling all over with the consciousness that several of her dearest friends were enjoying her discomfiture. The only thing that supported her during the remainder of that woeful dinner hour was the knowledge that she had secured a promise from the man who was the guest of the evening to come to her tennis-party!

"What great events from little causes spring!" It is pathetic to reflect that had not Mrs. Gunton obeyed her instincts and flown at the highest social game within her ken, Florence Arle would have married the man she adored in the course of a few days, and have been—what?

"Did you ever see a prettier get-up for tennis? But how should you know, you're an old bachelor and don't know a tennis-frock from a tea-gown."

"Don't I? seeing I've had to pay——"

"What?" Flo interrupted, swinging round to face him as she was stepping into the dog-cart which was to take them to the Vicarage, "had to pay for tennis-frocks and tea-gown——"

"Had to pay freely for their masculine equivalents, blazers and the like, during the wearing of which I've seen some rather costly specimens of feminine plumage."

"Mine isn't costly, it's only pretty," and she looked up at him, challenging his taste, from under the projecting brim of the neat hat which followed the lines of her head,

and in which the shades of moss-green and sage-green that composed the costume were deftly mingled."

"Very pretty!" He almost hustled her up into her seat as he spoke, for Violet had told him only a week or two before that moss-green and sage-green would be "well-worn" during the coming season. "Very pretty, only I happen to hate green."

"Then, after to day I won't wear it, John—though I happen to love it," she said quickly, as they drove off—he assuming the reins as if by right; she submitting to the assumption, partly because she loved him so much that she was ready to submit to anything that he did, and partly because her delicate consideration for him prompted her to spare him the knowledge that she exceedingly disliked being driven in her own dog-cart by anyone but herself.

He accepted her concession to his dislike to green silently, but he smiled at her approvingly, and they drove on without a word for a time. It was rather a steep descent from the yard to the high road, and Florence saw that the responsibility of driving a strange, high-spirited mare down-hill, over a rugged road thickly strewn with loose stones, sat heavily upon her companion. After a time, however, the silence became irksome, and she broke it by asking:

"Do you mind going to this party, John? I ought to have remembered that probably you are satiated with tennis, and would rather have stayed at home quietly after all the rushing about you've had lately."

"Do you think your uncle will come down to-night?"

The question seemed so utterly irrelevant that she looked round at him curiously as she replied:

"Don't know in the least. Would you rather have stayed at home on the chance of welcoming him?"

"Faith, no! It's not much of a welcome he'll get from me. The fact is, Flo, I don't want to hurt your mother's

feelings by expressing my honest opinion of her brother, but that uncle of yours is about as ill-conditioned an old bear as ever had the power given over to him of growling unrebuked in a family."

"I'm glad you didn't say that to mother; she would have thought you so unjust, for never once in all these years of goodness to us have we heard a 'growl' from dear Uncle Joe. What has put that idea into your head about him?"

"His beastly manner to me in town. The fact is, Flo, he's a narrow-minded, selfish, old fossil-hearted fellow. It suits him to be called the benefactor of the Arles, but he wants to keep every member of the Arle family in bondage in return for his beneficence. Now you have taken an altogether unlooked for departure. You will be out of his reach—beyond him!—in a position that is so much over his head that he will be unable to play the part of providence in it. This annoys him! I really believe he would rather have seen you married to one of his stable boys. You would have been under his control then; as it is, when you are my wife——"

"You'll never wish your wife to be mean and ungrateful, John. Why, even if I didn't love dear old Uncle Joe, I should always treat him with all the respect I know how to show. Think of what he has done for my father and mother! We should have been homeless and penniless since father's affliction if it hadn't been for Uncle Joe. You'll never, never wish me to seem careless of him, John. The thought of having the dear old man to stay with me in my very own home, where I can make much of him, and repay him a very little for all his kindness to me——"

"I shall only wish you to consult your husband's dignity a little, Flo. Mr. Cadly is a violently prejudiced old man, and has taken a dislike to me."

"Indeed he hasn't."

"But, indeed, I assure you he has. I bore with his

chawbacon insolence for your sake. But it was rather exhausting work, that effort to be tolerant and calm after the weeks of wearing, incessant labor which I had been undergoing in order that I might make your married life happier."

"Uncle Joe insolent to you! Now you must have mistaken him. Why, John, he's never rough to a stable cat, he's got the gentlest heart—he couldn't be insolent."

The girl was quivering with the earnestness and emotion she threw into her defence of the old uncle who had been the means of giving her all the pleasures she had known in life previous to the appearance of Mr. Phillipps upon the canvas. The road had slipped away from under them unobserved, and they were at the vicarage gates with the Uncle Joe question still unsolved between them.

"When a woman drags people to the uttermost ends of the earth to give her an excuse for having tennis-lawn, she might have the common decency to have her infernal gate opened," Mr. Phillipps grumbled as he got out of the dog-cart, grazing one shin raspingly in the process. As he jerked the gate open to its widest extent another carriage rolled up behind them, in which were seated the wife of the colonel of a regiment that had recently been quartered in Plymouth, and Sir Lionel Halford.

The gate was a light iron one, opening inwards to the garden, and Mr. Phillipps was holding it with a couple of fingers only. As the dog-cart passed through, the gate slipped from under these two fingers, and swung back, causing a little excitement in the minds of the horses in the carriage immediately behind them, and a consequent delay.

"Do stop and see if you can help them, John!" Florence Arle said, peremptorily, as she heard the horses plunge, and the lady in the carriage cry out in alarm. But Mr. Phillipps had jumped into the dog-cart and driven off rapidly before her lips could frame the request.

"Don't try to hinder me, dear," he said, speaking with an evident effort, "I've got one of those confounded attacks coming on. Ask your friend to let me lie down for an hour in a dark room, and I shall soon be all right again."

He had dashed along the short drive, and up to the Vicarage drive as he was speaking. His face had grown very pale. Fortunately a groom relieved them of the care of the horse at once, and they were in the house before the carriage following them drove up to the door.

"It is Mr. Phillipps—he is ill, may he go into Mr. Gunton's study and keep quiet?" Florence asked her hostess, who had come forward to meet them from the midst of a group who were having cake and claret-cup at a buffet in the hall.

"He shall come and rest in my own little sanctum. It is such an unlooked for pleasure to see you at all, Mr. Phillipps, I am sure we will all try to make you comfortable now we have got you here again. Come in here, this is my little den, and here you shall be quite undisturbed. Only the chosen few shall come and talk to you. and Florence shall choose them."

She lowered the blind to tone down the radiant beams of the afternoon sun, and stirred the wood fire to a cheerful blaze as she spoke, and Mr. Phillipps almost blessed her for the garrulity which spared him the necessity of speaking.

"Directly I feel better I'll join you on the lawn," he told her; "till then I'm better alone—even without Florence."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

SIR LIONEL had looked round when the horses jibbed at the clanging of the gates in their faces, and caught a faint glimpse of the man who was stepping into the dog-cart just ahead of them.

"Who's that? I seem to know him?" he asked hurriedly of his companion. She raised her eyes and looked in the wrong direction, and shook her head carelessly.

"I don't know any of the aborigines," she said scornfully. "I only came here to-day to please you, Lionel; don't expect me to give you names and descriptions of any of the people you meet."

"You are awfully good to come for what you imagined my pleasure," he laughed; "though how the notion got into your mind that I was craving for tennis to-day——"

"Oh, not that, not that at all; only this Mrs. Gunton turned into the barracks (hearing you were staying with us) to call on me, and she told me of some local beauty whom you're dying to see. So I thought I'd bring you for the fun of the thing. I wonder if Susan will see the fun of it if the local beauty annexes you?"

The lady who spoke was a cousin of Lady Susan Meadows, therefore her impertinences were rarely resented by Sir Lionel Halford.

"Take care not to tell her any apocryphal stories about me, for she's sure to pass them on to me, and then you'll be brought to confusion," he said, laughingly, as they drew up at the hall door. The fleeting impression he had received from the back view of the man in the dog-cart

had passed from his mind by the time Mrs. Gunton had greeted them. And when that lady had explained that she had "just settled Mr. Phillipps in a darkened room," he failed to associate the name with the impression of "seeming to know the man."

"Poor Miss Arle," Mrs. Gunton was plaintively addressing them both alternately, as she piloted them towards the garden. "Poor Miss Arle has only just arrived, and *he* is with her—the man I told you about, Sir Lionel, who had been treating her so badly, you know—quite a little romance; Mrs. Burley, you, with your knowledge of the world, will understand how bad it looks when a stranger proposes to marry a girl without introducing any of his family or friends to her. However, we must hope for the best, for she is really a very pretty girl, and it will be a thousand pities if he ends by jilting her." Then she sent an engaging smile in the direction of the pretty girl in question, and introduced her to the two new comers.

"You must not be uneasy—do enjoy your game. I will take care of Mr. Phillipps. You must let me tell him that you are not anxious."

Mrs. Gunton managed to say this in an affectedly confidential whisper that was distinctly audible to all who stood near them. There was no affectation of confidential secrecy in Florence's reply. She spoke out boldly, and Sir Lionel Halford liked her for it.

"I'm not a bit anxious, thank you, Mrs. Gunton. Mr. Phillipps is subject to these attacks. I shall have to get used to them. They're not dangerous."

She felt in some indefinable way that she was being put on the defence about her lover, and she felt very defiant. But defiant as she felt there was nothing but gentle courtesy in her manner of answering the bitterly sweet insinuations of her hostess.

"She's a plucky brick of a girl," Sir Lionel Halford

thought as he strolled along by her side towards the tennis court. Long years had fled since he first posed in these pages as Violet Grove's lover, and those years in passing had not turned him into greater comeliness. He was much ruddier and fatter than when we first knew him. There was but little eye-brow and still less eye-lash employed in the shading of his face. Nevertheless it was a good, kind face Florence saw, and she felt pleased that fate and Mrs. Gunton had assigned him to her for a time.

"The next set is already arranged. I am afraid I must ask you to wait!" Mr. Gunton explained to them. "Take a turn round the garden and look at my anemones, will you? Come along."

They went with him, but long before they reached the beds of anemones in the garden at the other end of the house, Mr. Gunton was called back, and Florence and Sir Lionel Halford strolled on alone.

They admired the gorgeous blaze, and discussed the respective merits of anemones and ranunculuses until they exhausted their subject and found themselves stranded on a high and dry bank of silence, from which it was rather an effort to launch the conversational barque again. Florence faced the difficulty first, for Sir Lionel Halford was lost in wondering amazement at the idea of any one conceiving it to be possible that any man could throw such a girl over! Mixed with this feeling was a strong desire to see the man who was suspected of such gross folly by Mrs. Gunton. He was unconscious himself of the intensity and earnestness of the gaze he was fixing upon her as these reflections passed through his mind. But when she looked up from the anemone bed suddenly and spoke to him, her face told him what his look at her had been.

"I was thinking," she said, "that the window with the blind half down must be the room where Mrs. Gunton put Mr. Phillipps to get over his headache."

"What made you say you must get used to his attacks?" he asked, and she told him quite easily.

"Don't you know that I am to be married to him very soon? I forgot, though, you're a stranger and probably haven't heard anything about it. Well, I am going to marry him, and so I must learn to bear my anxieties quietly when these attacks come on, for he's subject to them."

"You are anxious?" She looked at him steadily, the little half-frown on her brow.

"You're not married, or you would know that a woman can't help being anxious if anything ails him if she loves her husband."

"I'm not married. I've never had the luck to get the woman I loved to love me," he said with as much bitterness as his kindly soul could manage to impart into his words. Then he looked round and saw that they were quite alone in this part of the garden, and so drawing a little nearer to her he muttered:

"Run up to the window and ask him how he is? it will do him more good than all Mrs. Gunton's attentions; no one will see you, and I won't say a word about it."

The warm, sympathetic grateful blood rushed in a flood over her face, and Mr. Phillipps, watching the pair from the window of the half-darkened room, where he was recovering himself, saw the look that accompanied the blush, and misinterpreted it.

"That fellow is flattering her; he has a title, and his idiotic words of flattery please her! Curse him!" he thought, "if *he* catches sight of me, I'm a lost man!" Even as he thought it, Florence parted from her companion, ran across the grass, and tapped at the window.

"Are you better, John dear, is your head better?" she asked, and he groaned out in reply that he "was worse, much worse! couldn't she come round quietly and order the dog-cart, and get away without making a fuss?"

"I must say good-bye to Mrs. Gunton, but I can easily do that and slip away without anyone else knowing it.

That's Sir Lionel Halford over there on the lawn. John, he's a nice fellow! I wish you could have seen him!"

Another groan from the sofa on which Mr. Phillipps was huddled up was the sole reply to this, and it was the most telling reply he could have made, for it conveyed to Florence's mind the idea that he was suffering almost intolerably. Which, indeed, was the case! The agony of the dread of detection, the agony of shame which he suffered from in anticipation if he was detected, affected his whole nervous system and made his head ache as though it had been filled with physical instead of only moral pollution.

"I won't even say good-bye to Mrs. Gunton, I'll come at once," she hastened to reassure him, and he assented to the plan eagerly.

As she turned from the window Sir Lionel Halford crossed over from the flower beds and stopped her.

"You look awfully distressed, can I be of any use?" he asked.

"I am distressed; Mr. Phillipps is worse. I want to get away without making a fuss. Say to Mrs. Gunton that I was obliged to go suddenly, as he is worse."

"Let me order your trap for you."

"No, no, if you are missing any longer there'll be an exploring and recovery party in search of you. Go back to the tennis courts, please, and don't say anything till we're clear off."

"I will do exactly what you desire me to do, and I hope you will allow me to call and enquire for the cause of your anxiety? You have made this afternoon very pleasant to me, I wish you had not been obliged to go away."

"Of course you may call." Then she gave him the name of her uncle's house, shook hands with him and ran off, little thinking that the brief parting scene had roused a devil of jealousy in the breast of the man to whom all her heart and nearly all her thoughts were given.

"That pudding-headed idiot had better keep out of my

way," Mr. Phillipps mused resentfully, as he peeped from behind the curtain. Then he smiled miserably, grimly recognising a pitiful Nemesis in this that his wife's first love should be attracted to the point of annoying him (Phillipps-Twysden) by Florence.

"Moral old ladies would say it 'served me right' if she chucked me over for that fat little fool who has hung on to his one idea'd love for Violet all these years." The thought of Violet brought Jack to his memory, and with a savage exclamation, made under his breath, of impatience at not having heard "how the little chap is to-day," he obeyed the summons Florence sent him to slip out by a side door and get into the dog-cart in the stable yard.

She was on the box seat with the reins in her hands when he went out, and he made no attempt to alter the arrangement. He was constrained and suppressed, and a little bit frightened, to tell the truth.

"You drive, Flo, dear," he said moodily, as he got up by her side. "There's something in this atmosphere that brings out every rheumatic tendency I have inherited from a long line of remarkably rheumatic ancestors."

"Take this Shetland scarf and wrap round your throat, John," she suggested, and he grasped the white fleecy material and half covered his face in its folds.

"Now drive home fast, and pray God we don't find that your respected uncle has turned up in our absence. I'm not disposed to stroke Bruin to-day."

"You're not like yourself; you speak as if someone had tried to injure you!"

"It's the pain, the pain, my child! Never mind, *you* have enjoyed yourself. I saw you humbugging with that fellow over the spring flowers. Don't stop, Flo; drive on, drive on!"

Mrs. Gunton and Sir Lionel were in the drive directly in their path. It was impossible to drive on! Moreover, Florence had no intention of attempting to do it roughly.

"I must pull up and say good-bye. I can't be rude enough to pass without stopping to speak to her," the girl expostulated, reproachfully, while Mr. Phillipps raised his hat for a moment, and the next lowered his face down and half covered it with his handkerchief as if in excessive pain. In that one moment Sir Lionel had recognised, or thought he recognised, Phillipps-Twysden. Before he could speak, however, the mettlesome mare had pulled on a few paces—Florence was looking round, and trying to explain her sudden departure—Mrs. Gunton was interrupting her with loud and wordy expressions of regret—Phillipps-Twysden himself was muttering an entreaty to Florence to "drive on, for heaven's sake—and there was a general atmosphere of confusion. In that atmosphere Phillipps-Twysden escaped for a time. As the mare plunged forward Sir Lionel exclaimed:

"I never saw such a likeness in my life! I could have sworn as they drove up that that man was a fellow I knew, called Phillipps-Twysden."

"I should never be surprised to hear that he had a dozen aliases. Never!" Mrs. Gunton replied promptly. "Remember I know nothing about him; in fact, no one about here knows anything about him. The Arles must be very eager to get their daughter married, to consent to an engagement with a man who is a perfect stranger to *everyone* who is *anyone* in the neighborhood."

"What brought him here?" Sir Lionel asked musingly.

"No one knows—at least, I don't. And you think he's someone else under another name, don't you? Dear me! it's quite interesting, and grieved as I shall be on poor Florence Arle's account, I shall look upon it as quite a just judgment on her parents for having thrown her at his head as they must have done."

"Poor girl! I must be mistaken; I mean I hope I'm mistaken," Sir Lionel said hurriedly.

"Why do you hope you're mistaken? isn't the man you take him to be respectable?"

"Quite respectable, but married!" Sir Lionel said reluctantly.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BALL SET ROLLING.

"Is Phillipps-Twysden at Houndell? Let me know at once," Sir Lionel wrote to his friend, Lady Susan Meadows, by the night's post. For the sake of the true girl with whom he had looked at the anemones, he had done his best to exorcise the demon of suspicion which his own unguarded remarks to Mrs. Gunton had roused in the local mind. He had even gone so far as to assert that his second glance at the man in the dog-cart had shown him that his first glance had misled him.

"Second glances, like second thoughts, are the best, you know!" he had said to Mrs. Gunton on their way back to the tennis courts. "He can't be the man I took him for, so perhaps you'll kindly say nothing about it. He might have me up for libel, you know."

"You may rely on my discretion," Mrs. Gunton said sweetly. Within the next quarter of an hour her discretion had led her to tell each one of her guests, "in confidence," that Sir Lionel Halford had been quite startled by Mr. Phillipps' resemblance to a man he knew in London as a married man. And wasn't it shocking if it should turn out to be the case? though of course everyone would regret it, and would sympathise deeply with the poor girl if she was humbled—*justly* humbled!—in such a way.

Meanwhile Florence was having a miserable drive back to Eastmoor. For some minutes after the brief encounter with Mrs. Gunton and Sir Lionel, her companion did not

speak. When at last he did so, his nervous shaking tones alarmed her.

"If I am not more myself after a night's rest, I shall go up and see my doctor in town again to-morrow," he managed to articulate, but his voice shook, and his whole attitude and bearing were suggestive of his dreading or shrinking from something terrible. The girl who loved him and was unsuspicious of him, naturally thought this nervousness was caused by his having either a knowledge or a presentiment that his illness was likely to develop into something of a dangerous nature. All her generous womanly instincts were roused by this idea, and she longed to tell him that come what would she would be a true wife, nurse, comforter to him. Her impulse was checked by the thought that perhaps he would think her bold and forward and unduly anxious to be married to him if she urged her willingness to take him for better or worse just at this moment, when he seemed so absorbed in his own ailments. As she hesitated, and finally only brought out a common-place remark to the effect that she "hoped he would soon be better, and surely the pure moor air must do him more good than London's smoky atmosphere," he went on—his voice trembling, his head still bowed down, and his face still half muffled in the folds of the white Shetland scarf:

"What I am going to say will sound very pitiful, I'm afraid, Flo, my darling. But I had better say it and have done with it. I have had a warning to day that I dare not disregard! Before I marry you my health must be thoroughly re-established. The only way for this to be done effectually is to put myself under strict medical treatment and supervision. To do this I must be in London and—leave you for a time."

"Leave me!"

"Only for a time, until I am well again," he said hurriedly, for the sorrow in her face told him what her bitter

agony would be should she ever find him out to be what he was!

"Your mother will understand my reasons better than you can, my darling! Do you think I should propose such a course for any light reasons? No, no! you know me too well. Thank heaven, you *love me too well* to misunderstand me to such an extent as that. Our parting will not be for long, dear! Don't make it harder for me by mistrusting me."

"I shall never do that," she said simply; "it will be heart-breaking to have you go away ill, but I'll try and keep all the pain to myself. Not even mother must know how I shall feel it. Tell her I think you're right; settle it all with her. Only don't ask me to speak of it. We seemed to be so near to the time when we should belong entirely to one another, and now—now this has come! and I *can't bear* to look forward."

"Nor can I, or to look back either," was the inward thought which he dared not utter! How he regretted now that he had let his selfish passion for her bind him to this girl who had twined more closely round his heart than his wife had ever done, and to whose very existence he knew he had become necessary. He could have killed Sir Lionel or to have sent him without compunction into a lunatic asylum or a convict prison for the term of his natural life for having been such an untimely marplot. The sight of the man who had been his friend down here, on what he had regarded as such safe ground as far as his own acquaintances were concerned, had been a severe shock to him in very truth. It made him pause on the brink of the precipice into which he had been ready to plunge. Not that it banished the purpose he had of going through the form of marriage eventually with Florence from his mind, but it frightened him from carrying that purpose into effect till Sir Lionel's partial recognition of him should have passed from his, Sir Lionel's, mind. So

he resolved to go back to Houndell the next day, where Sir Lionel would hear of him from Lady Susan and be satisfied against the evidence of his own eyes that Phillipps-Twysden could not have been the man.

Florence Arle's long experience of young, restive and cunningly-shifty horses served her in good stead this day. She had learned in dealing with them to cultivate and practise the most complete self-control and composure, and she called these qualities into play now.

"We are home earlier than we expected to be, because John is not well," she explained to her mother as she came into the room where Mr. and Mrs. Arle were having tea; he will tell you what he proposes doing, mother, and you must know that I think he is quite right. I quite agree with his doing it."

"He doesn't want to be married to-morrow, *I hope?*" Mrs. Arle faltered.

"Indeed, no; you will not get rid of me for a long time, I fancy, dear. But John will tell you himself, by-and-bye. Be very kind to him when he tells you, mother, won't you? He is ill, and he makes himself worse by fretting about having to put off the wedding. You'll be very kind to him, won't you, mother dear?"

She spoke earnestly, but with such perfect steady composure that no one would have suspected that her heart was almost dying within her. She looked from one to the other of her parents, as she stood there in her pretty moss and sage-green costume, and they were rather inclined to think that she took the matter too coolly.

"He doesn't want to marry yet? Well! I never, after having made such a fuss and flurried me about it," Mrs. Arle spoke in a tone of supreme annoyance. She was not at all desirous of getting rid of her daughter, but when a mother has wrought herself up to the point of procuring the wedding garments and contemplating the immediately approaching separation with placidity, it is discouraging to be told that she has prepared herself in vain.

"He doesn't want to throw you over, does he?" Mr. Arle roused himself to say, painfully. And Florence went round and hid her face on her father's shoulder, as she answered:

"No, dear! I am quite satisfied. What he says is right. What he wishes to do is for the best."

What the explanation was with which Mr. Phillipps favored Mrs. Arle with respect to his change of plans need not be recorded here. It is enough to say that Florence's mother came out from her interview with him more prepossessed with his admirable unselfish qualities than she had even been before. She declared him to be "one in a thousand for discretion and forethought," and spent a long time in the kitchen that evening preparing some extra strong savory jelly and soup for him. She offered him a box of her own favorite infallible pills, of which the patient was directed to take five the first night, ten the second, and so on, adding five each night to the dose until the consumption arrived at forty-five. Then, according to the printed directions on the box, it was deemed prudent to stop.

He was leaning out of his bedroom window, leisurely casting the pills down into the yard where the fowls might find and partake of them in the morning, when he saw a lumbering station fly drive into the yard, and the next minute he heard Mr. Cadly's voice shouting out an inquiry as to whether "they'd all gone to bed."

"If that old miscreant has got hold of anything, I may as well throw up the game," he thought, drawing back into the room. He seemed to see Florence's eyes fixed upon him already with a look of contempt which was unsoftened by love or pity, or even reproach. "No, I couldn't face that," he told himself, and he drew near to the door resolving that if he heard Uncle Joe burst forth in a roar of furious invective and denunciation on hearing he (Phillipps) was in the house, he would make his way out of it at once, and leave Florence Arle's life unspoiled.

Anxiety and desperate fear made his hearing uncommonly acute. The old house had thick walls, and his bedroom was situated at the extreme end of the corridor, the furthest point from the staircase which led down to the parlor where the family were assembled. Nevertheless, in spite of the distance, he heard the tones in which they spoke, though the words were indistinct. And these tones reassured him. Uncle Joe had not come home a triumphant detective, with the catalogue of Phillipps-Twysden's misdoings at his fingers' ends, that was certain. Had it been otherwise there would have been less grumbling and more declaration on the old man's part. Then he heard a long drawn out plaintive monologue from Mrs. Arle, and intuition told him she was enlarging on his sad physical trials, and describing with what exemplary patience and fortitude he was bearing them and the disappointments they involved. And then—most reassuring sound of all, he heard Florence laugh as she rattled out an account of the means her mother had been prescribing for his cure.

"If she can joke about me to her uncle, and he can listen to her joke, I'm all safe as far as the old boy knows, but !—I shall still go to Houndell to-morrow."

The fact is Mr. Joe Cadly had come home a humbled and sadly disappointed man. He was still sure as ever in his own mind that there was something not only shady but distinctly dark about the character and career of the man who wanted to marry his niece, but he had been unable to put his finger upon the dark spot. He was left clambering up on an omnibus to a seat by the side of Major Noel, who had been the means of introducing Phillipps to Mrs. Broadhurst, and through her to Florence. But all Major Noel's best intentioned attempts to fully satisfy the old man's curiosity or suspicions, or whatever it might be, were unavailing.

"I can assure you I've known him for years, and I've always found him one of the best fellows in the world,"

the good-hearted soldier said heartily; and when old Joe Cadly shook an unbelieving head, he added, "what are you driving at? Tell me fairly and I'll answer you in the same way!"

"Mightn't he be married already, and you not know it, Major Noel?"

"Impossible, Mr. Cadly!"

"Mightn't he have another name and you not know it, sir?"

"Hardly likely. I've known John Phillipps too long and well for me to be mistaken about his name."

"Then I can tell you he is known to some as 'Twysden!'" Mr. Cadly whispered mysteriously; but Major Noel, who was just on the point of getting off the 'bus, only laughed, and did not seem to consider the matter at all important.

So it came to pass that Mr. Cadly came home as full of dreary, unsolved suspicions as he had been when he went away. But they were still merely suspicions. He was as far from having reached the hideous truth as ever.

Accordingly, he had no excuse for not shaking hands with his odious guest when that guest, at an early hour on the following morning, took his departure, amidst the sympathetic condolences of the rest of the family.

"May his shadow never darken these doors again, and may it soon be lifted off my little Flo's life," was the fervent prayer of the old horse trainer, as he went about his business. He was, if possible, more gentle and more considerate for Florence that day than he had ever been before.

"We've got our nestle-bird to ourselves again—no lovers in the way, thank God!" he said, when they sat down to dinner, and Florence smiled bravely and said:

"Perhaps you'll have the nestle-bird here all her life, Uncle Joe."

"Not all her life—but all mine, I hope."

"If the lover who has just gone never comes back, other lovers must never come here."

"Why do you say that? Why do you think he'll never come back?" Mr. Cadly asked with inconsistent angry fervor. In spite of everything that had passed through his mind with regard to Mr. Phillipps, it annoyed him that she should even herself hint at the possibility of any man jilting her.

"Why do I say it? O, because—because my happiness seems slipping from me," she said, and then at last she broke down and sobbed a little, while these tender hearts shivered and smarted under each sob, feeling that for all their deep love for her, they were powerless to ease her of one bit of her burden.

CHAPTER XX.

A CONFESSION OF FALLIBILITY.

LADY SUSAN'S answer did not reach Sir Lionel Halford for a few days; when it came it was entirely reassuring, and convinced him that he had been completely mistaken in supposing he had seen Phillipps-Twysden at Mrs. Gunton's garden party. His correspondent forgot to tell him that she had been absent from the Houndell neighborhood for a few days. She wrote merely, "I went to Houndell yesterday, and found dear little Jack slowly struggling back through convalescence to health. Mr. Phillipps-Twysden was there. What made you ask the question? Violet looks worn and sad, and I fancy that she and her husband are surely and not very slowly drifting farther and farther apart. But he is devoted to his boy, there is no doubt of that. He was in the room all the while I was there, so my intercourse with Violet was rather stilted, as it always is in his presence." Then she wound up with some message to Mrs. Burley, that cousin of hers with whom he was staying, and told him how glad her mother

and herself would be to meet him again when they all went back to town. As she signed herself in the ordinary way she thought, "I shall always be that 'his faithfully,' but I shall never get any nearer to him." And she smiled, half with pity, half with contempt at the clinging weakness which had kept her his "faithfully" and "unrequitedly" all these years.

When he got this letter he made one more effort to set the matter of his supposed mistake straight before he left the neighborhood, by quoting Lady Susan's letter to Mrs. Burley. But Mrs. Burley had already entirely forgotten both the names and personalities of the pair who had so deeply interested Sir Lionel.

"I remember you did go off with a girl to look at something or other, and that you stayed away a long time. You say she is pretty? I forgot her."

"She was a very charming girl, and I made a stupid mistake about the fellow she is engaged to."

"Oh, yes, she's engaged to a married man, or something ghastly of that kind. Really, these quiet country girls beat us hollow when they do take to the war-path." Mrs. Burley spoke quite merrily, and disgusted him with her frivolity as much as he was already disgusted with his own indiscretion.

"I'm telling you that I made a mistake. The man Miss Arle is engaged to isn't the fellow I took him to be. Don't you hear what Lady Susan says?" and again he read the passage in Lady Susan's letter which related to the Groves.

Mrs. Burley's thoughts were far away in some happy hunting ground of her own while he read. When he stopped and looked at her in expectation of some comment of comprehension she recalled her mind from its pleasant tour through past and present successes and said:

"How sick Susan and you must be of writing to one another. It must be so monotonous, you might just as well be married."

"You didn't listen to a word I read. Don't you understand? I want you, if you meet Mrs. Gunton or any of those people again, to correct a false impression which I was stupid enough to give——"

"I never corrected anything, much less an impression, in my life," the lady laughed, and he gave up the futile attempt to make a vain, flattered, frivolous woman feel an interest in a matter that did not concern herself.

After this he made one effort to find out where Miss Arle lived, in order to make enquiry for the man who had been taken ill at the garden party an excuse for calling on her. But here, again, he was frustrated by Mrs. Burley's inability to interest herself in outsiders.

"I believe the girl's house is somewhere in the middle of Dartmoor, miles from every place one can get at by train; and as for going to Mrs. Gunton's to find out, I tell you fairly, I never mean to go near Mrs. Gunton again if I can help it. She bores me, and if *you* go she'll take it as an encouragement to follow me up, and pretend to be intimate with me. Besides, what do you want to see the girl again for? I suppose she's fond of the man who has a wife all ready, or she wouldn't want to marry him; so you'd stand no chance with her."

"If you would only condescend to listen to me, you would understand that 'the man,' as you call him, has no wife, and you would leave off making mischievous assertions about his being already married."

"You made the assertion yourself, or I shouldn't have known anything about it, and I really don't care about it one way or the other. Only I'm not going to drag my horses miles over bad roads that break the springs of the carriage to garden parties in the wilds any more to please any one. If you want to cultivate Mrs. Gunton and the girl who wants to commit bigamy, you may go by yourself."

"If you'll listen to reason, Mrs. Burley——"

"I should never listen to you in that case," she laughed, and then, rather than give the subject an undue importance in her mind and enable her to still farther misrepresent it, he let it drop.

But though he did not see or hear anything more of Florence Arle, he often thought of the only woman who had had the power to interest him deeply, since Violet Grove had left him for his friend Phillipps-Twysden.

Unluckily, the interest he had taken in her did her far more harm than good in the limited circle which composed her world. Sir Lionel's remark was repeated and commented upon, paraphrased, edited, re-trimmed, and garnished out of all resemblance to its original unimportance. This only for a few days, certainly, but at the end of those few days, though people forgot both what the remark implied and also what they had said and implied about it, the impression remained that "there was something very queer about Florence Arle's affair," and Mrs. Broadhurst was often put upon the defensive by hearing slighting mention made of her favorite.

To Florence herself there were few who ventured to say anything that sounded disparaging or doubtful about the man to whom she had utterly surrendered her heart and judgment. Every little look or incident that had sometimes startled and sometimes worried her in their intercourse she blotted out from her memory now, and remembered only what was manly and frank and loving about him. Uncle Joe, humbled by the reflection that he had been baffled in his researches after something bad in Mr. Phillipps' antecedents by his ignorance of London life generally and of Mr. Phillipps' London career particularly, was obliged to content himself now with openly hoping for the best, and secretly fearing the worst. Mr. Arle was too well contented to keep his daughter with him during the little that he felt remained to him of life to either feel or express indignation at her lover leaving her with them

yet awhile. While as for Mrs. Arle, she was only one degree less infatuated with Mr. Phillipps than her daughter.

So though it was "weary waiting," Florence rode, ate, drank, and slept much as usual, supported through the tedious time by the belief in his unselfish love for her, a portionless girl, and by the knowledge of her great love for him. He wrote to her frequently, if not regularly, and his health seemed to be steadily, though slowly, improving. It might be, he sometimes hinted, that he would be unable to carry out his first intention, and give her a home in the country near her parents. The battle of life was a fierce one, and he might be compelled to fight it in London! To this note of warning Florence replied enthusiastically in the "Wherever thou art will be Erin to me" strain, and so the plan of residence difficulty which he had felt might be a hindrance, was swept away before him. Then ensued a long and confidential correspondence between the ardent lovers and the anxious mother, which resulted in Mrs. Arle declaring her intention of "going up to London for a holiday, and taking Florence with her."

"I s'pose while you're in London you'll see Mr. Phillipps?" uncle Joe suggested, to which Mrs. Arle replied, nervously:

"It would be odd indeed if we didn't; unnatural, I should say. But some people seem to take pleasure in thinking Mr. Phillipps is ready to be guilty of odd and unnatural conduct at any given opportunity."

"I hope you will be as ready to stick up for him when he has been your son-in-law for a year as you are now"

"The more I know of him, the more I shall value him, I feel sure of that, Joe."

"I confess I haven't such great expectation about him, but there, there, what's the use of talking when I'm such an old fool that I can do nothing better than talk," the old man said bitterly. On which his sister was merciful,

assuring him that she knew he meant well in all he said but that he couldn't be expected to understand such a man as Mr. Phillipps as well as she did.

"A woman isn't often deceived in the character of a man who wants to marry her daughter."

"I thought that, as a rule, she was deceived until the man was married to her daughter," he said, smiling at his sister's credulous confidence in that most unreliable quality, her own judgment. "Well, my dear, I hope nothing rash will be done. If Mr. Phillipps will bring any of his family forward and marry our child before them like a man, I'll—I'll alter my opinion of him."

Mrs. Arle looked at her narrow-minded brother pityingly.

The day before they were to go up, Florence rode over to say good-bye for a fortnight to Mrs. Broadhurst.

"What takes you there, Flo?"

"The train and my mother's wishes," Florence said, laughing happily, "and of course I'm delighted to go. I shall see Mr. Phillipps."

"I didn't know Mrs. Arle had any friends left in town. London is the abomination of desolation to people who know nothing of its ways, and have no friends there."

"There are one or two of her old friends left there, she finds. She hasn't seen them for fourteen or fifteen years, but she wrote to one the other day, and had a very kind reply. She's the widow of an artist friend of papa's, and she keeps a milliner's shop, and is rather a swell in her way, I believe——"

"Indeed! I have heard of such things, but they are quite out of the line of life of mere country gentle people!" Mrs. Broadhurst spoke a little scornfully. She was intensely conservative—not to say narrow—though she had "taken up" the horsebreeder's niece. Few things annoyed her more than to hear of people who were in rank above her by birth "going into trade." If the

offender was a countess or even the daughter of a countess Mrs. Broadhurst (being good-hearted!) condoned this offence! But that an artist's widow should descend to bonnet building, and then dare to get herself spoken of as a swell, was unpardonable in the local lady's eyes.

However she had no desire to either snub or dishearten the girl who was going to taste the flavor of London life for the first time in her grown-up experience. So she made a few more enquiries in a kindly encouraging way, and learnt from Florence that she and her mother were going up simply and truly (as far as the girl knew) for "a little change."

"The fact that she required it after all these years at Eastmoor seemed to flash upon mother quite suddenly," Florence explained. "You see all her young married life she lived in London, and had plenty of kind and interesting friends, and was quite a little somebody in their circle on account of papa. But down here, though she has been very happy with us two, and though Uncle Joe is all kindness to us all, she has no outside friends, and she has found it dull, the poor dear mother!"

"I should have thought the last few months had been full of excitement for her. I haven't a daughter, but if I had one, and she had got engaged to a stranger and was going to be married directly, I don't think I should feel 'dull.'"

Mrs. Broadhurst spoke as if Florence's explanation had not fully satisfied her.

CHAPTER XXI.

"HAVE I DONE RIGHT!"

FLORENCE ARLE had given her explanation of the hurriedly projected visit to town in perfect good faith. She had

been glad as a child to have the prospect of such a change, and happy as only a girl in love can be at the idea of seeing her lover. It did not occur to her to look below the surface, or to doubt or question the plan of campaign which held out such pleasant possibilities to her. Both her reason and her inclination assured her that Mrs. Arle's sudden craving for a break in the colorless monotonous routine of her existence at Eastmoor was a natural healthy sign of a still lively mind and sound body. The girl knew that her mother had heard once or twice from "Jack"—she had grown familiar enough to call her lover "Jack" in the family circle, though she carefully spoke of him as Mr. Phillipps to outsiders invariably. She had even seen the contents of one or two of his letters to Mrs. Arle, but they were quite of the common-place pre-son-in-law order, and contained no suggestions of a kind to alarm her or even excite her curiosity. But there were other letters of which she knew nothing, and of whose arguments and suggestions she was kept in ignorance until they reached the lodgings in the Portsdown Road, to which Mrs. Arle's old friend, the artist's widow, had recommended them.

"I shall not be able to meet you at the station, but I will call at your lodgings as soon as I can get away from business," Mr. Phillipps had said in his last letter to Florence, and though she had been a little disappointed at being compelled to dispel that vision of an impatient lover awaiting her on the platform, which she had conjured up, she bore her disappointment with resignation. Still she felt it a little hard that business should be so exacting on such a special occasion as this. For neither her mother nor herself were practised travellers, and it seemed as if every guard, porter, and cabman whom they encountered were aware of the fact. If Florence had been permitted to marshal their luggage in array, and then leave it in charge of her mother while she selected a

cab with a likely-looking horse, things would have been more comfortable in the end. But this was not permitted without much anxious interference from Mrs. Arle, who protested that it was not the thing for "a young girl to run about a crowded platform alone."

Florence was too courteous to remind her mother that their departure from the crowded platform would be expedited more by a self-possessed young woman running about and giving clear directions, than by a bewildered old lady's spasmodic attempts to arrest the steps and attention of every official who looked as if he might be able to recognise her luggage by intuition. However, at last they got safely away in a cab of Mrs. Arle's choosing, and though the horse jibbed a little, and was distressingly lame, they reached their lodgings in time to have tea by daylight.

The rooms were nearly as nice as report had said they were, and Mrs. Arle asked for nothing more for a few hours than the consciousness of sitting in what she called "a real upstairs London drawing room" again. The outlook into the Portsdown Road is not maddeningly lively and exhilarating at any time. But the friend who had chosen the lodgings had declared that the "view from the drawing-room window was very pleasant, especially in spring." And very pleasant Mrs. Arle found it, as she sat at the window with a new cap on her head, and read as much as she could see of the story of the street.

"There's a party going from next door in a cab, Flo, dressed for a dinner, I should say, or perhaps the theatre. How one does get behind the fashion to be sure in a place like Eastmoor. It's worth your while to get up and look at the way the skirt is put in behind! Never mind, dear, if you're tired and would rather not move. Dear! dear! there's a woman every day as old as I am with nothing on her head but her hair and a diamond pin! Well! if I had thousands a year and could cover myself with dia-

monds I'd never make myself so ridiculous. There! I hear them telling the cabman the Lyceum. I don't feel a bit tired, and would take you to some theatre to-night if we were not expecting John. Late business hours he keeps, poor fellow! I thought it was only poor clerks who were kept late at their offices, not rich principals. It must be seven o'clock, light as it is still. I am longing to have a stroll through the lighted streets again."

"Dear mother," Florence said, rising quickly from the sofa on which she had thrown herself, "let us go and have a stroll through the streets—they will amuse you more than sitting here watching strangers drive away in cabs."

She leant her arms against the window, wearily, as she spoke, and bent her fair head down on them.

"You're tired with the journey, Flo, I wouldn't be so selfish as to drag you out for my idle pleasure for the world! Besides, John may come in at any moment, and he would think we were very indifferent about seeing him if we were not here to receive him."

"He will never think that of me, that's the worst of it. He knows so well that my inclination will always be to wait on his pleasure."

"And I'm sure you'll always be able to follow your inclination—he'll never interfere with you," Mrs. Arle said with unconscious sarcasm, "but I'll tell you what I will do, I'll just pop on my bonnet and walk around that corner and have a look at some of the shops, and get a few trifles of grocery that we shall want, and you can stay here and wait for him."

So Florence assenting to this, the considerate mother followed out the programme she had proposed, and as the shops round the corner proved attractive to the woman who seldom saw a shop of any kind more than once in twelve months, Florence was left undisturbed for the next hour.

But when the daylight had quite died out of the sky,

and the lamps were lighted, a hansom rattled up to the door, and in another moment or two Mr. Phillipps came in, and Florence had no more time in which to brood over real or francied wrongs, disappointments, or sorrows.

For he was as eager, as happy to see her, as unreasonably elated at their reunion, as ready to forget every person and thing upon earth save themselves, as any lover of whom she had read in old romance.

"*You* are with me again, that's enough!" he said when she attempted to explain "why" mamma had not waited in for him. "Flo, I began to think I should never see you again. Let me look in your eyes, and see in them that you're just the same Flo I left?—not more cautious or timid or stupid! but just the same Flo!"

He put his hand under her chin and turned her face up to let the lamp-light fall upon it. As he did so, she laughed out clearly and merrily.

"I like that last word!" she said. "I'm sure men often get frightened, after they've proposed, about the brains of the girls they've proposed to. I've known a girl shiver at the idea of her real ignorances being found out after she got engaged to a man who thought her bright and clever at the ball or pic-nic at which he had met her. But you saw enough of me to find out that I was 'just the same Flo' at home as you thought me at that first ball! Stupid or not, I'm what you thought I was at first; and you like me better than anyone else in the world, don't you, Jack?"

"*Like* you! If I didn't like you——" he paused. He had no word at command wherewith to assure her of his absolute adoring preference for her over every other created being. Awkwardly enough, too, his memory fogged him, and his conscience stung him as a vision of little Jack, leaping lovingly at him, presented itself.

"What a beastly place this is, what on earth made your mother quarter herself here?" he grumbled presently.

The fact is, only a portion of him was Florence Arle's ardent lover regardless of surroundings! The major part of him was a selfish, pampered citizen, fully appreciative of the worship and renown he enjoyed in the domestic sphere at Weybridge and Houndell. Though he dreaded nothing so much as any revelation of his real life to Florence, he was disposed to think her a little bit selfish and unreasonable because she did not appreciate and be grateful to him for the sacrifices of home refinements and luxuries and social consideration which he was perpetually making for her. It ought to have struck her "as incongruous," he felt, that he, the master of that perfectly appointed home at Weybridge, and the prospective owner of grand old Houndell, should for love of her spend an evening in a lodging-house drawing-room! A room, the wall-paper of which was a blow in the eye to him—as, indeed, was the ghastly white marble mantelpiece decorated with cheap French vases, and the suite of furniture upholstered in green! When King Cophetua does step down, he likes the beggar-maid to be touched to sympathy and gratitude by the condescension, very naturally! Only, in this case, he was not recognised as King Cophetua.

"It doesn't much matter what the lodgings are like," she said with happy indifference. "When you're here I shan't think of them, and when you're away I shall be out with mother doing the sights of London like the country bumpkin I am. I should like to go to some of the theatres, Jack. Will you take us?"

He answered her question with another.

"Do you know why I wanted your mother and you to come up, Flo?"

"I didn't know that you 'wanted' us to come at all. Mother told me you had written to her to say you were delighted to hear of her plan of taking a holiday."

He was walking restlessly about the room, pausing now and again by the window to look out. His manner was hurried, uncertain, unlike himself.

The fact is he had come to this meeting through countless little difficulties and obstructions, which had marred and broken up a smoothly laid scheme. After having spent some time at Houndell to allay suspicion and justify the business-call which he had arranged should be made upon him this day, his arrangements at the last moment had been upset by Violet, who had insisted upon coming up to town to see her mother, who was ill. It was in vain that he had frowned upon her determination, in vain that he had sought the aid of the Twysdens' opinions to back him up.

"If I don't go to my dear mother now she is ill, I shall expect Jack to turn his back upon me when I'm dying," she said, and then the old people sided with her, and thought "John very unreasonable."

So Violet travelled up to town with him, rendering him uneasy and nervous by her mere presence, which jarred with those thoughts of Florence which were making his head throb and his blood leap in his veins. True, Violet had said good-bye to him at the railway station, and had been driven straight on to that little home on the other side of the Regent's Park, where Mr. and Mrs. Grove were living in a state of precariously genteel poverty. But the fact of her being up in town at all worried him, and made him dread the idea of going outside the door with Florence. He felt that Violet might meet them at any corner; there was no knowing into what parts, busy or obscure, "that mother of hers" might not encourage her to penetrate. And if they were to meet her! good-bye to his hopes of Florence.

"I think," he said, presently, coming back and sitting down by her side on the sofa, "it will be better for us to defer all theatre-going until after we are married, Flo. My crib is a long distance from here, and I shall never be able to get here very early, and then I shall be tired and disinclined to turn out for the theatre. After we're

married it will be different—your patience shall not be tried for very long, my darling."

"To have you here of an evening will be better than any theatre," she said, and she meant it, for her experience of the drama was as limited as was her knowledge of the man she loved. Then they had settled it that she was never to expect to see him until the evening, but he gave her permission to go to every place of amusement to which her mother could escort her by day. "Picture galleries and morning concerts, these must be your diversions while you're Miss Arle; as soon as you're Mrs. Phillipps you shall take me where you please."

Her face flushed and her heart beat quicker as she listened to him. But she was too proudly patient, too trusting, too modest, to ask when she was likely to become Mrs. Phillipps. So the time passed on until Mrs. Arle came home with a lobster and a cream cheese for supper, the sight of which when he was pressed hospitably to partake of them, made the man who had only just dined sumptuously feel sick. He thought of his ordinary dinner-table at home, of its glass glittering like crystal and silver gleaming black with polish, of the hot-house flowers that were always selected with a due regard to delicacy and freshness of perfume by Violet herself, and of the *entrées* at which he would not look if anything even distantly resembling them had challenged his appetite within a fortnight! "and this woman asks me to eat her rancid cream and unsubdued lobster!" he said to himself in savage indignation against Mrs. Arle for her want of taste and discernment. It annoyed him to see that Florence allowed hunger to overpower his refined distaste for the whole supper function. "What had he come to? to what idiotic depths had he not descended? when he could constrain himself to sit still at ten o'clock at night and see a girl he loved make a hearty meal off indigestible uncultivated lobster and cream cheese."

Before he left he had a little whispered colloquy with Mrs. Arle, and the result of this was that Florence was told they were going to remain three weeks in London, and "after that, well! we shall see after that!" Mrs. Arle said oracularly.

"We shall see Eastmoor again, I suppose, mother? I hope Jack will go down with us."

"Perhaps you won't see Eastmoor quite as soon as you think," said her mother, smiling happily, and with this Florence had to be content.

At the end of three weeks Florence learnt that their fifteen days' residence in the respective parishes in which he and she had been lodging had enabled him to procure the license for their marriage, which he showed her one morning. Mrs. Arle beamed with the joyous consciousness of having been in the secret all the time and two days after they were married at the church round the corner. Then poor Mrs. Arle's conscience smote her into asking, "Have I done right?"

CHAPTER XXII.

HE IS JACK'S FATHER.

WHILE Florence Arle's objections to being married to the man she preferred to the rest of the world without the sanction of or presence of her father and Uncle Joe were being ignored or overruled, Violet—the real wife of poor Florence's hero—was winning her mother back to health by the mere fact of her presence.

It was a very small house in which the Groves were spending the winter of their lives. But to Violet it was a veritable house of rest. Her father had grown to be content and at peace amidst his humble surroundings, so there was no cause for fretting on his account. Strong

coffee and fresh eggs, a liberal supply of the daily papers, and "a little something to do in the garden," kept Mr. Grove happy and satisfied during the hours of the afternoon. After his luncheon he liked to go and loiter about the Zoological Gardens, feeding the bears and finding out resemblances to former friends in the monkeys, till it was time for him to trot home to the little dinner that awaited him punctually at his favorite hour. After dinner, his cosy corner, where specials, new novels and an evening edition of his pet journal were put ready for him, supplied all his desires.

"I want nothing more, nothing more, my child?" he would say to Violet, with an evident desire to be rid of her attentions, when she would beg him to tell her "What more she could do for him."

"You see I've got accustomed to spending my evenings alone. Your dear mother's avocations lead her into society, and I can assure you, Violet, I ask for nothing more than her happiness and peace for myself."

He did not say this in an affectedly martyr-like spirit of dismal resignation, but quite cheerfully, and as if he meant it. So Violet, after one or two efforts to bear him company, felt herself free to go up to her mother's sick room and lighten the burden of inaction and idleness to that bright-hearted but now sorely suffering lady.

It was a "mere nothing" which had broken down Mrs. Grove, one of those "mere nothings" which are very apt to trip up and overthrow the energetic and unselfish ones of the world. She had gone on travelling long distances by day and giving her "musical and dramatic entertainment" in draughty "institutes" and badly-ventilated country-town guildhalls for some weeks after a feverish cold had taken possession of and weakened her. Then low fever and ague had assailed and conquered her, and forced her high spirit to bend to the inexorable, inevitable, and indomitable will, and to submit itself to the weakness of her body.

But now the worst was over, and she had her daughter with her, the daughter who by suffering and sad experience had grown to be almost more like a sister in sympathy and understanding than a child. It was pathetic to both the mother and daughter that Violet should experience this profound feeling of rest and respite in the humble little home which was all her parents had to offer her in exchange for the splendid one provided for her by her husband. Pathetic but very pleasant. If she could only have had little Jack with her, Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden would have been well contented to remain for the rest of her life under the shadow of this roof-tree where all things were exactly what they seemed. The absence of luxury and dainty food and surroundings was amply compensated for by the presence of love and the freedom in the atmosphere from all that savored of deception. There was clearly nothing to be "found out" by anyone about anything in this humble little Arcadia. Violet was quite content to sit down and rest and enjoy the repose, and forget all that was inexplicable in her married life. The time would soon come, she knew, when she would have to go back to her duties and her difficulties as Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden. But till that time came she was wise in making the most of the balmy air of peace and love which was enveloping her, and unconsciously healing and soothing her wounded heart and weary soul.

It was such a very little household that the task of nursing Mrs. Grove devolved nearly entirely upon the daughter, who was only too glad to take up the task and fulfil it. Violet did nothing else beyond writing daily to little Jack and going out for a short walk for health's sake in the unattractive suburb in which her father and mother lived. Her husband need have had no fear of meeting her in any one of the fashionable streets or resorts in which he had been accustomed to see her. That which she had come up to do, namely, nurse and attend to her mother,

she did thoroughly. But this Mr. Phillipps-Twysden did not know, for communications between them were now restricted to those of a purely business character. And so Mr. Phillipps-Twysden went warily in these days, and avoided every place in which he thought he might possibly cross the path of his wife.

At last, however, there came a day when Mrs. Grove was sufficiently recovered to be taken out for a drive. She longed to look at green leaves and flowers, bees, and her well-dressed fellow creatures again. So Violet ordered the coachman to take them round the Park and up to Kensington Gardens. Mrs. Grove could have seen just as many green leaves and flowers in the Regent's Park, but this would not suffice her. She yearned for a sight of the well-dressed fellow creatures, too. Therefore they came west in search of the spectacle, along by St. John's Wood and the canal, and so into the Park.

By-and-bye they were homeward bound again. It was still early in the day, between twelve and one, for Violet's faith in the beneficial influences of the morning sun and air was large. The driver of the little hired brougham took a short cut which led them past a church near the Portsdown Road, and Violet, looking out idly, saw a gentleman and lady come out and pause on the steps while a carriage drew up closer for them to get in. "It looks like a little quiet wedding—the bride evidently married in her travelling dress," she was saying, when she caught sight of the bridegroom's face, and started as if she been stung.

As she leant back pale and shaking, her mother began to question and surmise nervously, and Violet struggled into composure and an erect position again, under the awful consciousness that if *she* betrayed him now, her base husband would be openly dishonored. He was little Jack's father still! Her boy should never know to what a scoundrel he owed his being if she could keep that knowledge from him.

"It is nothing, mother dear," she muttered, leaning back and closing her eyes, and striving to turn all her mother's attention on herself. "The thought of my own wedding-day came over me, that is all. The poor creature who has just been married looked as happy as I did on my wedding-day, and I felt sorry for her when the awakening comes."

"My dear Violet, perhaps she has made a wise choice," Mrs. Grove said briskly. Then conscious that her words implied condemnation of her daughter's choice, she added, "After all, dear, there are many wives in the world who would look upon yours as a happy lot in comparison with their own. You are not a childless wife, and your husband, if he is not as devoted to you as he ought to be, has not left you for another woman. His 'business' and his billiards are your only rivals. There is a good deal of solid prosaic comfort in that."

Then Mrs. Grove went on to quote painful instances of girls whom she had known who were married to men who drank and disgraced and impoverished their wives and children; and others to whom their husbands were notoriously and insultingly unfaithful. And Violet listened quietly, bearing the while with the knowledge she had that her husband was viler than any of those men whom her mother was so strongly condemning. But "for Jack's sake, for little Jack's sake," she was praying to be given the grand strength to endure in silence, to spare him exposure, disgrace, punishment and destruction.

Right or wrong, this was the line she told herself she would adopt and follow to the end. He should cease to be her husband in everything but name from this day, but in name he should still be held to be worthy of being little Jack's father. For their boy's sake she would make it appear to all whom it concerned that she had grown cold to her husband, and that the separation, upon which she would insist was due to *her* fault, *her* temper! It did not occur to her

till she got home and thought about her hideous wrongs and his horrible sin, in the hours of the night, that she had neglected her duty—now, more, that she had connived at and been accessory to the even more hideous wrong which he had done to that poor girl who believed herself to have been made his wife that morning! It came to Violet now in a whirlwind of remorse and self-reproach, to feel that she had let a sister slip into destruction, when her hand could have saved her. But having once set her feet on this evil path of silence and concealment it behoved her to go on in it unfalteringly. Phillipps-Twysden's wretched second victim should never know through her (Violet) that she, the wretched second victim, was not his wife. "She will be innocent of all sin while she is ignorant of it, and I will never be the one to enlighten her ignorance, poor creature," she promised herself. And then she went over the whole subject again, feverishly, and tried to string some words together that she should say to him when he came back to Houndell and to her.

For that he would come back she felt sure, come back with a lie on his lips. How would he look when she told him she knew about his perfidy? How would he look? She could not bear to picture his face when she denounced him, for he was Jack's father, and she had loved him—till now!

CHAPTER XXIII.

NEARLY SAVED.

As soon as the deed was accomplished, and Mrs. Arle had allowed her daughter to be married without the knowledge of her father and uncle, without the faintest beat of the matrimonial drum, the poor lady felt very much alarmed at what she had done. Florence herself had opposed the

secrecy and suddenness of the marriage. But then Florence was a girl in love, and her opposition was soon overcome by the hot arguments of her lover, and the entreaties of her mother. "Your father and Uncle Joe will be pleased enough when it's over—that it's been done without any fuss or expense. And when you go down to Eastmoor a happy young wife, with your handsome husband by your side, they'll both be as proud as possible," Mrs. Arle prophesied cheerily.

"I don't think they'll like it," Florence protested, but for all her protests she allowed herself to be over-persuaded into doing what she felt to be a foolish thing.

"I hate the touch of romance about it, you must know, Jack," she told him when he thanked her for her tardy consent. "I didn't want any more fuss made about it than will be made now, but I should have liked to have gone to you from my father's home, and I should like to have heard Uncle Joe say 'God bless you, Flo,' on my wedding-day."

"I must confess," he said, "that the sound of Uncle Joe's voice rasps my nerves, so I don't pine to hear it on my wedding-day. What I do pine for is to have you, you only, you absolutely to myself, away from everyone who can try to separate us."

"No one can ever do that, Jack," she said so confidently that he felt almost sorry for her for a moment. The next moment he felt sorry for himself. If that confidence in him should ever be shaken he would be desolate indeed, for he would have no one to turn to, nowhere to hide his head. She would never bear a wrong silently; all the world will know that I'm a scoundrel the day Florence knows it, he told himself. But he did not love her the less for feeling this. He only longed the more to keep her confidence unshaken, and so keep his own comfort and happiness intact.

It would be easy enough to lead the dual life, and lead

it respectably in the eyes of the world, he had told himself before he went through the marriage ceremony in that hole-and-corner fashion with Florence. Mrs. Arle would go home, and for her own sake make the story run smoothly, run so smoothly that there should be but little bother about it in the neighborhood. Moreover, after all, who was there who would either dare or care to talk about it around the bride's old home? Mrs. Broadhurst, the vicar and his wife, and a few grooms and servants. Why, these good people might talk till the crash of doom and nothing could come of their wordiness. Their accents would be caught up by the winds from Dartmoor and purified long before they reached any of those centres of life in which he really was a personality.

He told himself these comforting things vaguely before he had carried his point, and persuaded Florence that it was well they should marry hurriedly and privately. But as soon as Florence yielded to his persuasive eloquence and to the arguments which were endorsed by her own mother, he began to feel that human judgment is likely to err, and that his judgment had been essentially human. A thousand little contemptible difficulties and hindrances cropped up as soon as the wedding was over, which he had never so much as thought of before the commission of the crime. A thousand pitfalls yawned before the feet which were accustomed to tread where they pleased unfalteringly. A thousand fears irritated him into saying or doing something which made his conduct appear crude and unreasonable in Florence's eyes. A thousand little circumstances which he was continually forgetting either cropped up or caused themselves to be remembered in a way that threatened him with exposure every five minutes! And more than a thousand little fears befel him.

To begin with, though Florence had been married in her travelling dress, expediency had decreed that she should go back to the lodgings after the marriage ceremony and wait

there till it was time to catch the train which was to bear them to the eastern county in which the honeymoon was to be passed. At these lodgings they found awaiting them unsuspiciously that old friend of Mrs. Arle's, who had developed from an artist's poverty-stricken widow into a wealthy fashionable milliner.

She was a large successful-looking blonde woman, with a bright easy manner, and a face and figure that readily lent themselves to the beneficent influences of dress. The germs of innumerable good qualities had doubtless been in her the old poverty-stricken days. But they had not been so apparent in her then as now. Therefore Mrs. Arle felt it deeply when her distinguished son-in-law gave vent to an utterance of exasperation on being introduced effusively to "my old friend Mrs. Raymont, whom everybody knows as Madame Claire." If anything can be forgiven to Mr. Phillipps, this momentary exasperation may be endured, for in the lady who was greeting his "sweet young wife" so sweetly, he recognised the court milliner to whom Violet always applied for her smartest hats and bonnets, tea-gowns, and jackets.

"I shall take your mother out of these dismal lodgings, and make her come and stay with me now," Mrs. Raymont was saying cordially to Florence. "If I can keep her till you come back from the honeymoon I will, you may be sure of that. Where are you going to live—or haven't you settled yet?" she added, turning abruptly to the bridegroom.

"Not in town at all," he answered curtly, and then he whispered a hurried entreaty to Florence to make haste and get away, not to stay and chatter with this professional gossip.

"*Not* in town!" echoed Mrs. Raymont, professing despair and speaking cheerfully in spite of the profession. "Oh! dear, I'm sorry for that, because I might help to make life a little pleasanter for Mrs. Phillipps if she lived

in town. I know so many people, and there is always so much going on in my set——"

She pulled up suddenly, seeing that she was outraging some feeling in Mr. Phillipps of which she was not cognisant. He was regarding her with an expression of malignant anger that was incomprehensible to the gay good-hearted lady, It would not have been so incomprehensible perhaps had she been aware that he had that very morning drawn a cheque for a large amount in payment of her bill for Violet's last quarter's hats and clothes. That she should pocket the money he paid her for his legal wife with one hand, and hold out the other in patronising friendship to Florence, struck him as being hideously incongruous.

Up to this hour he had rather liked Mrs. Arle as a pleasantly credulous, weak, worthy old thing, but now suddenly this imagination developed her into an obstinate exasperating old hindrance. He felt if she did not betake herself without delay to her home in the safe and remote country that she would become inimical and dangerous to him. Her friendship with this woman, this Mrs. Raymont, was a cruel surprise to spring upon him—an unjust, underhand, despicable trick to have played him, in fact a trick that none but a mother-in-law would have demeaned herself by playing.

These and sundry other reflections chased each other through the wretched man's brain as he waited alone, while Mrs. Arle and Mrs. Raymont were having a few last words upstairs with his wife.

His wife! Now that he had done the wicked deed which he had planned and carried out with such cold-blooded deliberation, his brain reeled and he faltered in his part as the contemplation of it forced itself upon him. His wife! They and she, too, poor girl, believed her to be that, and were happy in that belief, crediting him as they did with several noble and exalted qualities. But

how would it be if they found him out? *When* they found him out, rather, for they were sure to do that in time—such wickedness as his could not remain undiscovered for ever. And when that inevitable fatal discovery was made, what would little Jack think of his father?

This thought bore down upon him with such crushing force that he became oblivious of what were his present apparent duties. His one active sensation was that he must get out of this danger which was menacing his relation with his son. One ray of better feeling illumined his guilty mind It was that it would be better for Florence to think him heartless or a madman than that he should do her the irreparable wrong of taking her away from her mother's protection into what would be a life of degradation and misery. The impulse of the moment compelled him to a course of action that looked cowardly, but under the circumstances it was the least contemptible thing he could do. He picked up his hat and gloves and was quietly slipping out of the room intending to leave the house, when the sight of Florence flying downstairs to rejoin him arrested his surreptitious exit.

The good intention was defeated. The die was cast, and for ill and woe his fate and hers were inextricably mixed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

VIOLET ACCEPTS AN INVITATION.

WHEN one is firmly convinced that a thing is "impossible" the evidence of one's senses to the contrary is as a rule disregarded. At any rate this was the case with Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden. She had every reason to think her husband unkind, neglectful, and at times tyrannical. But she believed it to be "impossible" that Jack's father could be calculatingly criminal. Accordingly, long before she

met him again, and received a semi-explanation from him of the reason of his appearance at a church door with a pretty young woman, Violet had persuaded herself that there "was nothing" in the incident. The ladies were country friends, probably, bent on sight seeing. Though, why they should have selected that church which had no special architectural features to recommend it, she could not understand.

Nor could she remember exactly where the church was! She had looked out of the carriage, seen a building that she recognised as a church without looking at it, for all her perceptive faculties were occupied by the effort to grasp the fact that it *was* her husband coming out on the steps by the side of a pretty young woman. She now recollected that there had been nothing in the appearance of the pair to lead her to the erroneous conclusion to which she had jumped in her hot illiberal haste. After all she had only given them a momentary glance, for she had been afraid that her mother would look in the same direction and detect what Violet fancied was the criminal climax of her husband's evil doings. So in her nervous haste she had been stupidly unjust, she told herself, after a long argument with herself and her intuitive fears and doubts.

Still she thought she would either write to him or go to him and tell him the truth; tell him what she had seen, and what she had feared and fancied. After harboring such a horrible suspicion against him even for a moment it was due to him that she should make her confession and humiliate herself, and ask him to pardon her for having so grossly construed his innocent action. She was one of those women who can do nothing by halves with caution. As in her anger, while the suspicion that he was foully false had been a conviction, as then she had been implacable, so now that she had crushed the conviction was she humbled into generous penitence.

"If only I could see him *at once*" she kept on saying to

herself in a glow of renewed good feeling towards him, "I could say so many things that I can never write."

But there was a difficulty about seeing him either at once or for some time to come. She found when she did make her way to his house of business in the city, the clerks did not know her by sight and when she gave them to understand that she was their chief's wife they looked a little surprised, or a little amazed. She could hardly tell which, but that they were one or the other she was certain.

He had been called away to Paris by a telegram the day before, she was told at last, but he "was expected back in a day or two," one of the seniors added, and Violet strove to look dignified under her disappointment, and replied with a light air of indifference, which was palpably assumed, that she "should probably find a letter from him awaiting her at home."

Then she went on to say rather timidly that she was behindhand with her news on account of having been absent from home nursing her mother.

As soon as she had said this, she realized that she had made a mistake in having volunteered any explanation of her ignorance of her husband's whereabouts and doings.

But the situation was a trying one. No wonder that she stumbled in striving to pass through it.

She got herself out of the office and into the street presently, and walked hastily along, not caring or heeding in which direction she was going. She had wrought herself up to such a pitch of excited penitential feeling on account of her supposed misjudgment of her husband, that she was now experiencing the reactionary chill and depression, physically as well as mentally. All anger against him, all suspicion of his worst offence, had been blotted out of her mind before she started on her pardon-seeking mission. Now that she had failed to find him, it seemed to her that Providence was aggrieved with her,

and was punishing her for the disloyal doubt which she had permitted to obscure her mind. At least she would not act in opposition to what she knew were his wishes any longer. She would go home to Houndell and little Jack the very next day, and trust to her mother's loving instincts for forgiveness for her apparently unreasonably abrupt departure.

Her heart lightened a little and her eyes began to take note of her surroundings when she had come to this conclusion. She had walked hastily through Fleet Street and the Strand without observing anything. Now she found herself in Pall Mall, with the sun shining brightly, with carriages passing and repassing her full of well-dressed women. Suddenly it came upon her that she was not costumed with her usual care. In her ecstasy of emotional repentance for the fancied wrong she had done her husband, she had gone out to seek him dressed in the plain black cashmere which had done duty through the long days of waiting and watching, serving and nursing in her mother's sick room. All at once she grew conscious that the dress looked creased and rusty in the bright summer sunshine. No wonder her husband's clerks had looked doubtfully at her. There was a country air about the architecture of her bonnet, too, and a distinct suggestion of last year about the cut of her mantle.

"I must be looking terribly dowdy," she thought, smilling the smile of one who can remedy that appalling feminine defect at any given moment. Then she went on trying to find good in the evil, telling herself that as "John was so fastidious about a woman's dress and appearance, it had been all for the best that she had not found him and presented her unsatisfactorily appointed self before him." And then she remembered that she had no perfectly reasonable gowns and mantles up in town with her. It had been bright, keen spring weather when she left Houndell, and now summer had blazed out with old-fashioned fervor and force and unexpectedness.

Naturally the discovery of her deficiencies was followed at once by the desire to supply them.

There was no one who could do this better than Madame Claire.

The handsome prosperous artistic milliner who dressed herself and other people so well was on the point of leaving her business for the day when Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden went in. The artist's widow was ceasing from her pleasant labors earlier than usual out of kind consideration for an old friend, a timid-looking little middle-aged countrified lady, who tried to keep in the background and unnoticed, while Madame Claire gave a few minutes to one of her favorite clients.

"If it had been anyone but Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden I should have gone and left her to my forewoman," Madame Claire said, half in greeting to Violet, half in explanation to the timid-looking lady whom she was about to treat to the dazzling delights of a drive in the park in a crowd not one of whom had a personality for easily-pleased Mrs. Arle.

It did not take long to give and take Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden's orders. But Violet and Madame Claire were old friends, and though the friendship had fluctuated since Violet's marriage it had never died out. From Mrs. Grove Madame Claire had learnt enough of the character of the former lady's son-in-law to understand pretty clearly why Violet Phillipps-Twysden was not quite what Violet Grove had been. If the kind-hearted woman had ever felt wounded or sore at what resembled a falling away from the old familiar intimacy on Violet's part, she quickly exorcised the unjust feeling by reminding herself that Violet's father and mother suffered more from Mr. Phillipps-Twysden's unconventional arbitrariness than she could ever suffer. So now, when Violet appeared with apparently her time and her manner at her own free disposal, Madame Claire relapsed at once into the Mrs. Raymont of social life and welcomed her warmly.

"Just for half an hour," she whispered apologetically to her old country friend, Mrs. Arle. "I haven't seen her for several months, and I knew her when she was a girl, and made her first ball dress; we must have a cup of tea and a little gossip, and then you shall have your drive, my dear—stay till the park is empty if you like."

So Mrs. Arle assenting—as she always would assent to any plan that was proposed to her—and Violet gladly accepting the invitation, they all three went back into a room where seats that were triumphs of cosy comfort invited them to repose, and fragrant tea disposed them to chatter.

There was of course a good deal said at first about gowns and bonnets, but in the discussion on the relative merits of the Empire, Directoire, and tailor-made styles, the elderly country lady was quite unable to bear a part. The other two being too good-natured as well as too courteous to exclude her or sail away from her, tacked gracefully and came alongside of her, as it were, inviting her to fall in and consort with them easily.

"Mrs. Arle has been up in town on pleasant business—she has been marrying a daughter," Mrs. Raymont said cheerily; whereupon Violet expressed cordially civil interest in the recent affair, which led Mrs. Arle into a confidential discourse on the subject of the suddenness of the wedding.

"You must understand," she explained, as earnestly as if this stranger must of necessity be as much wrought upon by the subject as she was herself, "you must understand that there was not the slightest objection to Mr. Phillipps on our part, not the very slightest; but we are very peculiarly situated, as I have been telling Mrs. Raymont, and my brother, with whom we live, though he is one of the best of men and kindest of brothers, is a *little* bit crotchetty."

Violet smiled with such sympathetic grace that Mrs. Arle went on even more confidentially—

"I ought to be a well-satisfied mother—and indeed I am, for my dear girl has married a good steady man, who has come to years of discretion without being elderly. I have always been afraid, as she mixed a good deal with a wild rackety set down in the country, that she would marry one of the horsey, fast young men she has been in the habit of meeting in the hunting-field, and I really think if she had done that it would have broken my heart. But she has made a wiser choice, and married the man I would have chosen for her if I'd had the pick of all the men I've ever known."

Violet thought of the antipathy which existed between her husband and her mother, as she said with genuine feeling:

"How happy your regard for her husband must make your daughter. There must always be a sense of incompleteness in a woman's life if there is coolness or dislike between her husband and her mother. Your daughter has been brought up in the country, you say? Will she lead a London life now?"

"Well, I hardly know yet," Mrs. Arle said, throwing herself into the discussion of the subject delightedly. "It was almost settled when they were first engaged that she should take a house near Eastmoor, so as to be near us still. But, as my brother pointed out to me, that would involve such frequent absences from home for Mr. Phillipps, who would, of course, have to come up to town to see to his business, that the plan was given up, and now I believe they'll take a house in London. Florence won't care much where it is though," the mother went on with a contented smile, "she'll have *him* with her, and that's the best of marrying for love. One place is the same as another if you're only happy with the man you marry."

"I don't know about that," Mrs. Raymont objected merrily. "Even with the man I loved I should prefer Belgravia to Ball's Pond. But Florence is a dear unso-

phisticated country girl still, and doesn't care anything about these distinctions of district. The girl has led such a picturesque life," the hearty prosperous milliner went on, explaining to Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden. "I'll tell you all about it one day, and show her to you, too, when she comes back. She's well worth looking at, I can assure you, and if Belgravia is the place selected for her home, she will soon be heard of as a beauty, I predict."

"Oh, she'll always live very quietly—very quietly," Mrs. Arle interposed in some alarm; "she will never bring herself to do the things you've told me of some of your fashionable ladies doing for notoriety—never, never. However much Florence may be admired, and even I, as her mother, can't help seeing that she's very pretty, and has a most taking way, she'll never want to make a show of her good looks."

Then Mrs. Arle, having mounted a favorite hobby, rode it recklessly over a course of which she knew nothing save by hearsay, and denounced with more energy than either eloquence or elegance, the viciousness of the age in which women permitted their photographs to be shown in shop windows, and accepted valuable presents from men who were not their husbands.

When Violet rose to take her leave at last she remembered her intention of going down to Houndell the next day.

"You must send my things to Houndell. I shall be there for the next three months," she was explaining to Mrs. Raymont, when Mrs. Arle struck in cheerfully—

"Houndell? I know that name in Devonshire, near Cornwood."

"This is Houndell in Somersetshire," Violet explained sweetly. "A dear old-world place that is to be my own one day—that I've got to love dearly as my home already, though it doesn't belong to me yet. Do you live in Devonshire?—you spoke of the country."

"Yes, in Devonshire, and in a pretty wild part too—right upon Dartmoor. But it's a pretty place is Eastmoor—wild and remote, but a pretty comfortable old place. Perhaps if you come so far west as Plymouth you would come out to Eastmoor and see me? If you are fond of horses my brother could show you some beauties."

"You are very kind," Violet was saying.

She was touched by the unconventional trusting, confiding cordiality of the invitation, and at the same time she was half-amazed as she conjured up a vision of how her fastidious conventional husband would look should he ever hear of the proposition.

"You are very kind," and then she paused, and Mrs. Raymont came to her aid in an unexpected way.

"See here. Listen. I have a beautiful idea," she said. "When your daughter pays her visit to her old home with her handsome husband, I will run down to Houndell and persuade Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden to go on with me to Plymouth for two or three days, and one day we will go out to Eastmoor and see that quaint bit of real life for ourselves. Shall we do so?"

She was appealing to Violet and the appeal being backed by hospitable words of invitation from Mrs. Arle, Violet found herself saying—

"I should like it—I should like it more than I can say. Eastmoor will be a new experience for me—a perfect revelation, I am sure. If Mrs. Raymont will take me I will go with pleasure."

"She's a sweet creature," Mrs. Arle said when Violet had left them, and at length they were travelling towards the park.

"What did you say her name was?"

"Phillipps-Twysden."

Mrs. Raymont enunciated the name rapidly, slurred it in fact, for at the moment someone she knew rode up to speak to her.

"Oh, Phillippson." Mrs. Arle muttered it over to herself. "A Jewess, I suppose, though I shouldn't have thought so to look at her. Perhaps, though, she's a Christian who's married a Jew—a Jew who's not strict; that's it, no doubt.

"Is your friend's husband of the Jewish persuasion?" she asked, abruptly, and Mrs. Raymont, who was thinking of something else, replied rapidly——

"I don't know. Yes, I think, but I've never seen him."

"The *name* is Jewish."

Mrs. Arle spoke with authority, and Mrs. Raymont, who hated a controversy, acquiesced at once.

"To be sure it is. I never thought of it though."

"Oh, distinctly Jewish," Mrs. Arle said with proper pride in her discovery. "Phillippson! The name struck me as Jewish at once."

Amidst the crash and din of horses' feet and carriage wheels Mrs. Raymont failed to hear a word her friend was saying. But it did just as well to smile as to speak, so she smiled assentingly.

CHAPTER XXV.

SIR LIONEL SAID "YES."

FLORENCE'S honeymoon was a short one. From the moment of their marriage she was pained to observe that restlessness was the predominant characteristic of her husband. He was not impatient or unkind to her, but he was both these things to an exasperating degree to everyone else who crossed his wishes or his path.

There was much that was worryingly monotonous to her even in the halcyon honeymoon days in the sound of the harsh rasping tones of perpetual complaint or denunciation which he discharged at everyone whose painful duty

it was to minister to their wants when they were stationary, or to facilitate their progress when they were travelling.

Her prophetic instinct told her that the day would come when the sound of his voice would make her nervous. Not that she would ever be afraid of him, she thought, with proud confidence, but she might get to be afraid of what other people would think and say about what might strike strangers as being unreasonable, ungrateful discontent. It galled her to feel that he should give his inferiors (she believed the majority of created beings to be "inferior" to this hero of hers) the opportunity of feeling superior when his lapses from self-control caused him to exhibit his infirmities of temper. Her sight was so quickened by love for him and pride in him that she saw waiters grin in derision when he swore at them for nothing, though in reality they had not even so much as a sad smile on their faces. She detected contempt in the stolid indifference of station masters and railway guards. She resented as insolence in fact the obtuseness of "the general" to his fine wrath, which was as nothing to them. And finally she hoped the day was far distant when she should have to either apologise for or defend him to her own people and her old friend Mrs. Broadhurst.

But through all this honeymoon heavy weather, he never wavered in the display of a desperate, absorbing love and devotion to her, and she, being a woman, to be won by such display, gave him in return the unbounded wealth of love and gratitude which was stored up in her innocent, faithful young heart. To her he was a man of men, infinitely dearer now that he was her husband, than he had been in those feverish uncertain days when he had been her spasmodically ardent lover. That it would go on so for all the years of their lives she never doubted on those rare occasions when she did steady herself and look ahead.

The truth is, she had no premonitory pangs about crossing the dead dull level of middle life—no drear dread of the difficulties that might trip either of them up when they were going down the hill. For the present her path seemed an onward and upward one, watered and glorified by rays of such love and tenderness as he told her, and she believed—she and she only had ever inspired in him.

So far so good, one is often tempted to murmur when one hears of a young married couple returning undaunted and eager for the strife from the harassing honeymoon. If the gilt has not been rubbed off the gingerbread during that period of probation, then indeed may the bride be counted a lucky woman. Florence could not have affirmed solemnly that none of the gilt had been brushed away; but she was quite prepared to swear that the gingerbread which was left was of the sweetest and wholesomest description. To be sure he had made her shudder at times when "those trying hotel and railway people had been so annoying." But he had done nothing to shake her happy conviction that she was not only his wife, but the queen of his soul.

This happy confidence received a trifling shock very shortly after their coming back to London and every-day life. He had taken her to a great caravansery of an hotel, where she felt quite lost in the huge throng, none of whom she knew, and he had given her to understand that just for a few days he should be too much engaged with his business to attend to any of her enquiries or suggestions about their future home.

"You can amuse yourself here for a week or two, my darling, can't you?" he had asked her when they first arrived, tired from a long journey, and she had answered confidently that "of course she could amuse herself, everything being new to her, and there being too much for her to see of which she had never even dreamt hitherto.

"Besides, Jack," she added, "while you're out I can go

and see Mrs. Raymont sometimes. She has been so kind to dear mother, took her to the theatre and gave her drives in the park, and altogether brightened her up and braced her nerves before the dear mother went home to break the news of our marriage to papa and uncle Joe."

"I'd rather you didn't renew your acquaintance with Mrs. Raymont, or Madame Claire, or whatever the woman's name is. I was not very favorably impressed with her."

"But, Jack, she has been so kind to mother, and I've promised to go and call. Mother's last letter reminded me of my promise, and I must keep it; you may not have been favorably impressed with Mrs. Raymont during the few minutes you saw her, but that's not a reason for my being rude to her. There is nothing against her, and she is a friend of my mother's."

Florence spoke with ease, with perfect good temper and frankness, but with primness. The man who loved Violet for so many years felt that this woman, though she idolized him, would not be his slave. He scowled and looked dejected, which hurt her feelings, but did not induce her to give in.

"She is just the sort of woman to lead you into extravagance that I am not prepared to stand."

"I am not the sort of woman to be led into extravagances by Mrs. Raymont, or anyone else," she said cheerfully, but she could not help remembering that he had told her mother that she (Florence) was the one extravagance of his life, and that he should never grudge aught he spent in gaining and keeping her.

"You don't know how insidiously these fashionable women lead you unsophisticated ones on."

"Come, Jack, you haven't been married long enough to preach against your wife's extravagance yet," she laughed, and he was conscious that his face was glowing painfully as she held hers up to be kissed.

"The fact is"—he spoke impetuously—"I am jealous of everyone, even of this woman Claire, coming near you. I want to keep you to myself entirely; I want to live for you only and to feel that you live only for me. Can you do this, Florence?"

"No, I can't any more than you can," she replied, distinctly and with decision. "It would be silly of us to start by pretending that we wanted to do anything so unreal. I have my own family and my friends; I am not going to die to them because I have come to you, though you are dearer than any of them, and you can't have lived all these years without having liked a lot of people, though of course you've never loved anyone as you love me."

"There's an end of one of my illusions at any rate," he said bitterly. "You whom I thought so unworldly and unselfish are like the rest of your sex, after all. Before marriage you seemed to desire nothing more than my society; with it appears as if you were pining for any society but mine."

"You are unjust, and a little bit morbid. If you don't feel it, and know it, my assurance that you are dearer to me now, Jack, than ever you were before wouldn't convince you. But it's the truth. So as I want to go on to the end feeling that you are the wisest and kindest as well as the nearest and dearest of men—I shall try to act like a sensible woman."

He had no time for argument just then. Self-interest told him that he would do ill in pushing Florence into open defiance of any foolish rules selfishness might induce him to lay down for her guidance. So after giving a grudging consent to her calling on Mrs. Raymont, he said:

"If you see her to-day, don't make any engagement with her. I have heavy arrears of correspondence to look through at the office; and I may find that I'm obliged to run out of town. In that case, I shouldn't choose you to be going out with Mrs. Raymont, or anyone else."

"Do let me go to the office and help you through your correspondence, Jack. I should love to do that."

"Not for the world," he replied harshly. "I told that interfering old bloke, your uncle, that I meant to keep you, and my domestic life with you, entirely apart from my public and business one. That is my intention still, and you must submit to be guided by me."

"I will, of course, in this matter," she said thoughtfully, and he had to be content with this slight submission; still, she was not disposed to vouchsafe any more. But he found himself hating that former experience of hers with unbroken and undisciplined colts, which had taught her to be so steadily and calmly self-reliant, composed and confident.

"She'll be kittle-cattle to deal with," he told himself, smiling sourly as he went on his way. "If she stands up in this way against me about a woman for whom she doesn't care a damn, how will it be when her own interests, or the interests of someone dearer than herself are at stake?" As this thought flashed across his mind he was tempted to wish that he had never seen her; never been tempted to sin for her as he had done, to his lasting shame and her possible sorrow. He thought of his bonnie little son Jack, too, and the wish grew stronger. What if little Jack should ever know the truth and learn to hate and despise his father? He found as he anticipated a large and important correspondence awaiting him. But before it is told how he acted after reading it, Florence shall be followed through the events of the day.

As soon as she had parted from him, the young wife, left to her own devices for the first time since their marriage, wrote a long letter jointly to her father and mother. This brought her to luncheon time. To lunch alone in the hotel was dull, so she started off in search of a confectioner's, and fortified herself for the fatigues of the remainder of the day with tarts and chocolate. The shop windows

amused her for another hour, and then the longing to have a woman to speak to about all the lovely things that were appealing to her womanly taste seized her, and she made her way as fast as she could to Madame Claire.

The handsome, happy milliner was delighted to welcome her, and pleased by the prompt attention shown in calling on her at once. Madame Claire was too good-natured to allow herself to think that Florence had been driven to her so immediately by dulness. On the contrary, she persisted in declaring that it was her own strong will-power which had brought Mrs. Phillipps to her so soon.

"I have three stalls for the Savoy for to-night," she told her visitor. "You and your husband must come with me —say yes, and let me send a telegram to Mr. Phillipps, saying I shall keep you to dinner, and he must join us."

To this proposal Florence assented cheerfully. Jack could not possibly object to her going to the theatre with Mrs. Raymont if he were asked to countenance the plan and included in the invitation; and she had a keen desire to see the current comic opera at the Savoy.

Accordingly the telegram was dispatched, and in due time the reply to it was received.

"Reluctantly refuse—am obliged to leave town for two days—wife must please herself."

"I'm sorry he can't come, but I am delighted to be able to provide you with an evening's entertaiment in his absence," Mrs. Raymont said blithely, as she tossed the telegram to Florence. "We'll find another escort, for I can't waste the stall. Let me think—I mustn't take anyone too attractive, or Mr. Phillipps may be jealous."

"Don't take anyone who is dull," Florence said frankly. "Jack would never be jealous of me, and I would much rather have an attractive man to speak to at the theatre than an unattractive one."

"We'll take a turn or two in the park presently; we're sure to meet someone I know, and we must trust to luck

to find that someone disengaged. Your charming presence will counter-balance the disadvantages of a short notice with most men, my dear."

"My being married will be in the scale with the short notice, though, won't it?" Florence asked laughingly.

She was quite on pleasure bent this day. Her youthful, healthy vitality was asserting itself. She couldn't bring herself even to feel sorry that her husband had gone away for a day or two without giving her a farewell kiss. "Dear Jack, he'll be with me again the day after to-morrow," she told herself re-assuringly, as she prepared for her drive with Mrs. Raymont; meantime she had the prospect of the park and the Savoy before her, and she was young, and just beginning to find out that she was beautiful.

They had not been in the park a minute before Mrs. Raymont's greys were pulled up at the command of their mistress, while that mistress was bending forward and extending her hand graciously to a man who was leisurely making his way through the block.

"Sir Lionel! I've not seen you for an age. Oh, you know Mrs. Phillipps already, do you? Well, that gives me confidence to ask you. Dine with us to-night, and go to the Savoy with us. We are unprotected and have a stall to spare. Say yes."

Sir Lionel looked at the brilliant face which had worn such a sad expression when he saw it last—on that memorable occasion of their bending over the anemone bed together—and said "yes," enthusiastically.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"THE HUSBANDS WILL CLASH."

AMONG the many letters which were awaiting Phillipps-Twysden was one from Violet, asking him to come to Houndell as soon as he could.

"Mr. Twysden is very ill," she wrote, "his time will be short we all feel, and he longs to have you here. Moreover, Jack wants to see his father badly. You will find the little man looking so well and jolly, so unlike the delicate, fragile little chap you left nearly a month ago."

"Violet has ceased to care what I do or what becomes of me," he thought bitterly, as he read Violet's letter. "She doesn't even reproach me with my neglect of her and the boy during these last weeks. I wish to God I could unlive them. As it is, I must fight my battle without aid or sympathy; and what a battle it is to fight!"

A ghastly battle truly, the wretched man's most severe critic must have admitted that, as he throbbed about palpitating between many plans for an hour or two, and finally settled on one that seemed the least dangerous on receipt of Madame Claire's telegram. Much as he disliked this idea of Florence's going to a theatre with the widely known Madame Claire, he hailed it almost with relief this day, as it would enable him to get away without the fuss and trouble of preliminary questioning.

"She can't get into mischief, or meet anyone she oughtn't to know, just this once," he thought with regard to Florence. And so—the desire to see little Jack being strong upon him—he went down to Houndell, starting late from Town, and arriving late and unexpectedly at his destination.

While he was steaming along, complacently congratulating himself on the fact of the odds being heavily against the probability of Florence's making any undesirable acquaintance this one evening of his being off guard, that young, happy, and perfectly independent and innocent lady was doing the very thing he would least have desired to see her do, namely, cementing an intimacy with Sir Lionel Halford, which was destined to influence the future lives of both of them materially.

It was so pleasant, both to the man and the lady, to

meet again, that each showed that pleasure freely, making Mrs. Raymont's little dinner go off pleasantly and easily, as little dinners are apt to do when the hostess has invited people to partake of it who are thoroughly in harmony with each other and herself.

It was a genuine treat to Florence to meet Sir Lionel Halford again. When her heart had been heavy and her prospects dubious and under a cloud, he had shown her sympathy and kindness in an honest unobtrusive way that had won her gratitude, and given him a kindly place in her memory. Now that she met him again in the dawn of the happy married life which had seemed so far distant on the day of that garden party, she welcomed him almost like an old friend, and did her utmost to make him understand that she was glad to see him.

"Really, if I didn't know better, I should say you were flirting with Sir Lionel," Mrs. Raymont said laughingly, when they were putting on their wraps for the theatre.

"I shouldn't have flirted with him even if I hadn't been married."

Florence told the truth so easily that her hostess, who had not been at all averse to a little harmless flirtation in her own early married days believed her, and went on more gravely:

"I don't know, my dear child. Moreover, he's the last man in the world to descend to a flirtation with any woman, married or single. He fell in love years ago with a girl who married his friend, and since then he seems to have abjured not only matrimony, but love-making. At one time people said he was going to marry Lady Susan Meadows, but I always said he would be a faithful Johnnie to the last to Violet Phillipps-Twysden."

"Poor fellow!"

Florence looked as compassionate as she felt, so it came to pass that the glance which met Sir Lionel's when he came forward to help her into the carriage was the softest

and sweetest that he had ever received from a woman's eyes. Fidelity was a quality for which she had the greatest regard and esteem. This plain, plump, faithful little baronet irresistibly commanded her attention and liking from the moment she heard that during all the best years of his manhood he had been faithful to the memory of a woman who had preferred his friend before him.

"How I should like to know the story," she thought, looking earnestly at the rosy, commonplace face, which masked such loyalty and faithfulness. "I wonder if he'll ever tell it to me. How Jack would like him. I must get them to know one another; they'd get on so well."

"My husband will be back in a day or two—will you come and see us then?" she asked cordially, when he enquired where she was living now.

Then she gave him their address, and he promised to call, his heart beating ominously as he did so, with the recollection of the vague suspicion which had upset his mind when Mr. Phillipps passed him in the vicarage drive.

"My husband is such a busy man," the girl went on confidentially. "He tells me I must be prepared for his being here, there and everywhere excepting at home the greater part of his time. He's a City man, you know; he has a big place of some sort in the City, but he says all I am to know about it is that he makes his money by it. He doesn't like women to be disturbed and anxious about business affairs."

"Have you many friends in Town? It will be dull for you, won't it, if your husband is away so much?"

"I've no friends but Mrs. Raymont, so I shall bother her very often; but I shan't be dull. Uncle Joe gave me a horse before I married, and I suppose I shall have that up soon."

"Mustn't ride alone, you know, dear!"

"Indeed, Mrs. Raymont, I shall. When Jack can't ride

with me, I shall ride alone. Why, I've done it all my life, and now that I'm 'a married woman' (she laughed proudly) there's less reason than ever why I should have a groom. I should always make for the country, you know—the Row will never see me unless Jack is with me."

Sir Lionel found himself hoping that this dear woman's faith in Jack might never be weakened, or that if ever it was, he (Sir Lionel) might never hear of it. "I could find it in my heart to shoot the fellow if he ever plays fast and loose with such a wife as that," Sir Lionel thought as he looked at her with yearning pity (for which he could not account) in heart and the most commonplace expression in his pale blue eyes. "I wish he hadn't reminded me of the scoundrel who married poor Violet. It's against him, though I'm a suspicious, mean-spirited ass to think it."

In the course of the evening Florence learnt that a proposal had been made that Mrs. Raymont should visit Mrs. Arle at Eastmoor.

"It will be like a fairy tale to me to go out on a beautiful wild moor and look at a lot of beautiful wild colts, and probably I shall want to give up bonnet-building for colt breaking. I'm not the figure for that any longer, unfortunately," the jolly-looking lady went on hilariously. "This Uncle Joe, of yours, of whom I hear so much, won't be likely to offer *me* a thousand a year to show off his horses, will he? But I shall have Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden with me; perhaps he may be able to make her your substitute; she's lovely, and a first-rate horsewoman."

It was all idle, merry talk, with nothing in it; and Florence was listening to it idly and merrily too, until that mention of Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden was made. Then something—she supposed it was the natural jealousy of a horse-woman who had been called "peerless" in her own country—lowered her spirits, and made her flat and tired.

"A first-rate rider in Rotten Row would be very much out of it on a half-broken colt on Dartmoor," she said coldly.

Then she asked quickly—

"Why should this Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden go to Eastmoor? *She* is not an old friend of my mother's."

"They met at my house and liked each other," Mrs. Raymont explained. "Poor Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden, who has not been allowed free intercourse with her mother since she married that respectable brute Phillipps-Twysden, she felt her heart go out to your mother, Florence, when she heard the dear old thing expatiating on your luck in having such a husband, and her happiness in possessing such a son-in-law."

"Did he want to cut her off from her mother? That was brutal, but she shouldn't have given in," Florence said quickly.

"When she gave in she adored him," Mrs. Raymont said drily.

"I adore Jack, but I wouldn't give up my mother or my friends to please an idle whim of his," Florence replied, and the same look came into her eyes that was in them when colts grew viciously unreasonable under her, and she settled in her saddle to her work of government.

"It must be as bad for a man as it is for a horse to be treated as if he were something so terrible and so strong that he must have his way at any cost to other people."

Mrs. Raymont smiled. "My dear," she said, "I could almost find it in my heart to wish that you had married Phillipps-Twysden; he wouldn't have had such an easy time to practise his domineering tricks if you had held the whip while he trotted round the domestic circus."

Florence's brow relaxed, and her lips smiled in unison with her eyes.

"I was a goose to say what I did," she contended, "there is a difference in our cases. Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden has a husband who can be unjust, and a bit cruel it seems. Now, I have a husband who couldn't be either if he tried—he's too true and manly."

When she said this, Sir Lionel was more sorry than ever that in a moment of short-sightedness he had allowed himself to fancy a resemblance between Violet's Phillipps-Twysden and Florence's Jack.

"She's a dear girl, utterly unspoilt and unconventional, isn't she?" Mrs. Raymont said to Sir Lionel, as they chatted together for a few minutes after depositing Florence at her hotel.

"A sweet woman—one of the best and nicest I ever met," he said earnestly.

"At the same time, my dear friend, I wouldn't call on her if I were you. Jack is not what she sees and paints him."

He nodded his head in assent.

"She will be very much alone; she feels that already. I would like to get some good woman about her—a woman like Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden."

"My dear friend, it's impossible, the husbands would clash. I happened to see Florence's hero on his wedding day, and a worse conditioned chap I trust I may never meet again. Now I don't know Mr. Phillipps-Twysden by sight, but I know him well by repute, and I should say in many things he was the counterpart of Florence's Jack. Let well alone, Sir Lionel; if you want to do anything quixotic, introduce your good friend Lady Susan to our little Dartmoor wild-flower. Yet what am I saying? They are too far apart in social interests, something would have to be powerfully wrenched in order to bring them together."

"I think I'll try to bring them together without using any force that may wrench the order of things out of shape. Good-night, Mrs. Raymont; thank you for a happy evening, and for having shown me more of a very admirable character—a character that interests me greatly."

She was driving off as he spoke, but she used the check-

string, put her head out of the window, and called him back.

"Don't try to bring Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden and my young friend Mrs. Phillipps together; don't do it; the husbands will clash. I am sure of it, and you will burn your fingers. And—forgive me for being so plain-spoken—don't call on Mrs. Phillipps till I tell you to do so."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"DO COME HOME EARLY."

MR. PHILLIPPS-TWYSDEN regretted many things bitterly as he drove up to the entrance door of Houndell at a late hour that night. But, among the many things, the one he most bitterly regretted was that he had come at all.

That Violet would meet him with averted looks and a cold manner, even if she did not openly and bitterly reproach him with his neglect of herself and their son, he confidently expected.

And he was conscious that lying explanations would not rise readily to his lips as they had done in former days. He was so distraught with his double set of domestic difficulties already, that he felt himself getting mixed, and feared that the apologies he would have to offer Violet might in his confusion be worked in a way that was meant to suit Florence's ears and case.

However, when he entered the house, he felt at once, from the air of reverential hush which was over all things, that he would not have to combat reproaches.

Violet met him presently with a tear-blurred face, and told him brokenly that he "was too late," their good, generous old friend, this man who had been like a father to him, was dead; and the grief in Violet's heart put a keener edge on the uncalled-for remorse she had felt for having momentarily distrusted her husband.

She greeted him affectionately, almost tenderly, and took him at once to look at their sleeping child. She ordered a dainty repast for him, sat by him while he ate it, and altogether made him feel quite safe and at ease.

To his grateful and infinite relief she did not ask him any questions about his travels or the cause of them. The present sorrow in the house formed the chief topic between them.

Consequently they kept away from all the subjects that were marked "dangerous" in his social and moral chart.

Old Miss Twysden, broken down by grief, had gone to bed, and the doctor and lawyer had both departed, so that the Phillipps-Twysdens suffered no interruptions during the earlier hours of the renewal of their intercourse. He plied Violet freely with questions about the old man's last illness and death, and when he had satisfied himself fully on these points he rose up yawning, and asked her to let him have a "quiet room apart from all household noises, in which he might have a chance of sleeping undisturbedly till the morning."

The same relations were maintained between them for the four following days. Then came the funeral and the reading of the will. Houndell—contrary to Mr. Phillipps-Twysden's expectations—was left to the testator's sister for her life. At her death the whole of this property, without any reservation whatever, was left "for her separate use, and at her absolute disposal, to Violet Phillipps-Twysden, wife of John Phillipps Twysden."

He maintained an air of almost stolid calm until the will had been read and the company had dispersed. Then he went up to Violet, and said in a voice that sounded horribly harsh to her:

"You have played your game well—you have supplanted me. From to-day we will live as strangers, if you please. I have not decided what shall be done with my son."

"John!" she cried.

She put her hands out feebly to grasp and stay him. The monstrosity of his accusation stupefied her faculties for a moment. Then the half threat about her boy strung her up to speech and action.

"You shall not take him from me. You are unjust, cruel, to speak as if I could or would take anything from you. When Houndell is mine, it will be yours, most absolutely. I did not know the contents of the will any more than you did. Don't look at me like that, John. Take it *with me* when it comes to me. Let us be happy, and cease to distrust one another."

"It's easy for you to say that," he snarled. "You're the winner; the spotless Puritan who has posed as an injured wife before a weak minded old man for her own ends. When Jack is seven years I may claim him, till then I'll trust him with you, but willingly I will never see you again!"

"You must be mad, John!"

"I am quite sane," he spoke, with a snarling laugh that made her tremble

"You shall not have the boy; you shall not take my darling from me when you cast me off so shamefully. Think of how I loved you, John; think of what I have borne from you."

"What do you know—I mean what do you think you have against me?" he interrupted suspiciously. "The very way you word your plea for my toleration is enough to drive a man mad. You ask me to think of how you have loved me, thereby implying that you do so no longer. I know this well enough, but no man likes to be told point blank that his wife has ceased to care for him."

"You *dare* not desert me entirely for nothing," she cried with blazing eyes; "you dare not shirk your duties as husband and father because you are tired of me——"

She paused, for the door opened, and two or three servants tumbled into the room.

"Please to come, mam—missus has changed—seems in a dead faint," they said, speaking together.

She ran up to the poor old lady's bed-room and tried the usual remedies, while a servant rode off at once to Wexton for a doctor. But long before he came the faithful old sister had gone to rejoin the brother whose sorrows and sympathies had been in such sad unison with her own.

"And now, madam, you are the mistress and owner of Houndell," Phillipps-Twysden said as he made his wife a bow of mocking salutation. "Upon my word you have played your cards well; your perfidy passes all understanding."

He would not even go through the form of staying to pay the last poor offering of respect to the woman who had been like a mother to him, but left Houndell that day. Jack went to the station in the carriage that took his father away, and until she had her boy safe by her side again, poor Violet tortured herself with wild alarm, lest he be spirited away from her. Up to the last she kept up the pretense before the child of being on good terms with his father. It seemed to her too awful a thing that Jack should know how callous, cold and unjust a man that father was; so she dressed her face, and hid the loathing which her husband's conduct was beginning to inspire in her.

In some ways Phillipps-Twysden's visit to Houndell had ended better than he had anticipated.

Violet, now with a good property of her own, would cease to look to him for supplies, therefore he would be able to provide for that other one who was dependent on him. In addition to this source of gratification, he had another. Up to the present, at least, Violet had no suspicion of his having violated the law. It would be easy sailing henceforth; he had cut himself asunder from her on the reasonable ground of indignation at her having so basely superseded him with the old Twysdens. He would

forget her and everything connected with her—except Jack—and by-and-by, when Jack was a big boy, he would take him from her. But it was a far cry to that day, and in the meantime he, Phillipps-Twysden, would be happy with the wife of his heart—Florence.

It annoyed him not a little when he got back to town to find that Florence had met Sir Lionel Halford.

"I happen to know something by hearsay about the fellow, and I won't have you knowing him. He's an ugly little pup, and presumes on his ugliness to worm himself into houses and do a great deal of damage. I'll break his head if ever I find him calling on you, and the mere fact of her having introduced him to you proves that that Mrs. Raymont isn't a safe companion for you. You must drop that intimacy, my darling—drop it as gently as you like, but with decision."

"I can't do that, Jack. She is a friend of mother's; she's a dear, kind woman, and a good one, too, I feel. I can't drop her for nothing."

"You refuse to obey me, Flo?"

He said it with his sternest, gravest air, but Florence was not impressed.

"I refuse, yes. It would be bad to obey you implicitly when you give an absurdly unjust order; it would be like giving way to a colt's objection to passing a steam engine. When can I have my gee up? Mother says Uncle Joe is ready to send him any day."

"Some husbands would refuse to let you have the horse till you agreed to their terms about other matters."

"Then I'm glad you're not like 'some husbands,'" she said with a happy confidence, and as he did not want to be worsted in another argument with her, he agreed that she should have the horse up at once.

Now that Violet was settled for life naturally at Houndell, there was no reason against his settling in a new house in London in any situation in which he was not al-

ready known. House-hunting was not an occupation that commended itself to his taste, so he relegated it to Florence, giving her the choice of several districts, and practically leaving the question of rent to her discretion. To his surprise and unmitigated annoyance, she fixed on a house in the Regent's Park, and nothing that he could say in favor of more fashionable localities made her waver in her choice.

"I can so easily get gallops out into the country from there," she argued. "It's a lovely country about Edgware, and I can get into it easily from the Regent's Park. I shall never be a fashionable woman, you see, Jack. Perhaps if I were one you wouldn't like it, for I'd be a thoroughpaced one if I were one at all, and then you'd find me very expensive."

"I suppose I must give in to you," he said; and he gave in, but he didn't like it, and still less did he like the way in which Florence took his concessions for granted.

They had been settled in their new house about a week when Florence met him with a very bright face.

"Do come home early to-morrow," she entreated. "Mrs. Raymont is coming to afternoon tea, and she is going to bring a friend with her—a Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VIOLET MEETS "THAT OTHER WOMAN."

"I WILL take you to see one of the most charming young women in the world. She's unlike anything you or I ever met with before. She combines a boy's boldness with a girl's sweetness, and when you've seen her I'll tell you her story, and you will understand how she comes by her combination of qualities."

Thus spoke Madame Claire to Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden

on the occasion of the first visit the latter lady had paid (since the death of the Twysdens) to her old friend the fashionable milliner.

"I have Jack with me, you know," Violet was beginning, when Madame Claire interrupted her.

"Take the boy, of course. I'll write a line to Florence Phillipps and tell her we'll go to afternoon tea with her to-morrow. She's the most unconventional creature I ever met with, and yet there is not a suspicion of fastness or indiscretion about her. But when you've seen her I'll tell you how she has been brought up, and then you'll wonder that she is not more like a stable-boy than a fascinating young British matron."

Madame Claire had no more time at her disposal just then in which to discuss Florence's attractive peculiarities, and Violet had even less time to listen, as her days in London were numbered, and she had many social and business claims to settle. She had neither seen nor heard from her husband since he had left Houndell that day with the threat on his lips that he would never willingly see her again. There was no actual separation, but virtually she knew that it was a complete one; and she was striving to do her best to order her life admirably without him. It was hard on her boy now, and would be bad for him by and by. She knew that he would be launched on to the sea of life without a helping hand from a father who was still alive. Nevertheless, she faced her responsibilities bravely, and prayed that the courage and tact might be given her to always keep from little Jack the knowledge that the father he had been taught to obey and honor as well as love, was unworthy both of obedience and honor.

To very few even of her nearest friends did Violet confide the story of the parting that was to be for life between her husband and herself. There was no need to publish it to a number of mere acquaintances by whom she would soon be quite forgotten, now that she meant to close her

career in London altogether, and live entirely at Houndell. Her father and mother knew the truth, and she told it also to Lady Susan Meadows. Then her confidences would have ended had not Madame Claire asked her outright, "if the *rôle* of country gentleman would be one which Mr. Phillipps-Twysden would assume with pleasure?"

"He won't assume it at all," said Violet.

"But surely, you won't let that lovely old place?"

"I shall live there with little Jack," Violet answered steadily.

Then two tears came into her eyes, and she said hastily—

"Don't ask me about it, mamma will tell you the truth about it. No, I will tell you the truth myself. My husband is tired of me, and he makes the fact of Houndell being left to me, instead of him, the excuse for leaving me altogether."

"The pitiful fellow."

"Don't call him that to me. I try to think that I am in fault some way for not having kept his love; but I can't accuse myself. I have been very patient, I have borne more coldness and neglect and unkindness from him than I care to recall. But all this would have been nothing to me if he hadn't tired of me—'grown sick to death at the sight of me,' he told me truthfully in his rage when he was leaving me. Mine has been a sad, spoilt life, but I must make the best of what is left of it for my Jack's sake."

"You will be happier now you know the worst—now you know that you have lost him altogether—than you were while you were dreading it only." Madame Claire spoke with the philosophy of an outsider, and then hastened to change the subject by asking Mrs. Phillipps Twysden to go and see Florence Phillipps.

"I can introduce these two dear young women to one another with safety now that there are not *two* disagreeable husbands to diplomatically square and avoid," the

elder lady thought cheerfully. "Now that Violet is quite independent, she may be a perfect God-send to my other charming young friend, whose husband will be a handful for *her* if I'm not mistaken, before long."

So she wrote to Florence announcing herself and Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden as imminent at afternoon tea on the day following, and Mr. Phillipps was told of the coming guests just as he was on the point of starting for his office in the morning.

For a few moments he felt disposed to order Florence to accompany him somewhere—anywhere, and remain away all day. But he remembered in time that Florence was certain not to obey an unreasonable order. Enforcing his authority was a pleasant pastime with a woman who yielded easily as Violet had been wont to do. Florence was made of different stuff. She would not yield easily, or at all, unless she were told why it would be well she should do so. And even if he gave her several reasons, and she did not think them good, she would regard the laws of politeness and hospitality, accept his reasons, and stay at home to receive Mrs. Raymont and Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden.

So he dismissed the idea of taking her with him, since he knew she wouldn't go, from his mind, and went moodily from the breakfast-table up to his dressing-room to collect his thoughts and plan a few precautionary measures against fatal disclosures and discoveries. How he cursed the vanity now which had led him to have himself photographed very large, in several positions; and how he almost cursed the loving pride which had made Florence frame these photographs strikingly, and place them in prominent positions in the various rooms.

He slunk quietly down to the drawing-room and picked up a couple of large portraits of himself on porcelain, and a panel photograph, which, draped in Indian silk, rested on an easel. These he carried up to his dressing-room

and locked away in a drawer. As he was doing it he heard Florence come up singing to her bedroom, and his brow grew quite clammy as he thought of the steadfast look of enquiry she would level at him when she found he had hidden his portraits surreptitiously.

However, he got them safely stowed away under lock and key, and opened the door preparing to go downstairs with an unconcerned air of swagger, but Florence ran from her room and stopped him on the landing, buttoning up her jacket as she came.

"Not gone yet, Jack? Wait for me now. I'm going up to a florist's in Baker street. I want to make a flower and photograph table, and make the drawing-room altogether lovely for my visitors this afternoon."

"All right, don't hurry yourself; I'll go down and look at the paper till you're ready," he assented eagerly.

And then he ran down and glanced round the dining-room, and discovered two or three more cabinet editions of his manly charms in various places of honor on mantelpiece and brackets. All these he swooped into a sideboard drawer, which he locked. Then he went out and met Florence in the hall, and they left the house together before she discovered how her rooms had been denuded of what she regarded as their chief ornaments.

"You will come home in time to see them, won't you, Jack?" she pleaded as she parted with him at the door of the florist's shop.

"Afternoon tea is a thing I shall always avoid unless I know you're going to be alone, Flo."

"Well, as a rule I won't ask you to come, but I want you to see this Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden. I heard Sir Lionel Halford and Mrs. Raymont talking about her, and from what they said I fancy she is not a very happy woman; in fact I think she has found marriage a failure,"

"Indeed." He spoke coldly, and held up his stick to hail a hansom as he did so.

"How ghastly pale you are, Jack," she cried in some alarm; but he sprang into the hansom without answering, and she went into the florist's shop and speedily forget him—or at least her momentary anxiety about him—among the ferns and flowers.

The country-bred girl, who had been accustomed to pick bushels-full of blooms whenever the fancy seized her to do so, gave her orders lavishly. She selected about a dozen plants and as many pots of huge maiden-hair ferns and then paused to consider the predominant color of her rooms before she committed herself to the selection of the cut blooms. "My drawing-room is rather mixed, dull blues and terra-cottas and blue china," she remarked to the person who was attending to her numerous wants. And in a minute a suggestive group of flowers loosely and exquisitely arrayed were laid before her, tempting her on to such expenditure as would have startled her if she had been conscious of it.

Finally she made her choice—white flowers, roses and pelargoniums for the mantelpiece and brackets above it, begonias of every shade for an octagon Chippendale table, and boquet-d'or roses and ferns for the larger table on which stood her collection of photographs. Then finding she had not money enough in her purse to pay for them, she ordered the bill to be sent home with them, and went away rejoicing in the thought of possessing them, and unconscious that she had expended about five pounds in the fleeting floral decoration of one room.

She did not miss the photographs until after her luncheon, when the flowers arrived and she was about to arrange them, and then her distress was great. That they had been stolen she had not a moment's doubt. But who could the thief be to take objects of so little value when there were so many more precious ones close at hand, and equally unguarded? To be sure, one of the photographs was in a silver frame that had cost a guinea, but there were

silver goblets on the sideboard worth ten. So robbery for gain could not have been the thief's object.

Had she a mad person in her household by any chance? A dangerous maniac, who had conceived either a deadly hatred or an even more deadly love for her dear Jack. The possibility was an awful one, but Florence was courageous, and faced it at once.

Ringing her servants up into her presence, she questioned them sharply and clearly, and was relieved to find them as much puzzled about the mysterious disappearance of the photographs as she was herself, and was also further perfectly convinced that neither cook, house, nor parlor-maid entertained an unhallowed attachment to her master.

She sent for a policeman, who came, and after searching the house from cellar to garret and finding nothing, shook his head and solemnly declared his belief, "that there was more in it than he liked the looks of."

He added that he'd keep his eye not only on the house, but on some queer characters he had seen some nights before in the park. But these wise saws of his failed to comfort Florence for the loss ot the photographs, though she felt sure Jack would compensate her for them freely by giving her as many more.

It damped her pleasure in receiving her guests that she was not able to proudly point out, "my husband," to the stranger. Still she made an effort to throw off the feeling of annoyance when she recognized in Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden and her little son the lovely woman and pretty little boy who had attracted her so powerfully in the shop in Plymouth "long ago—before I was married," she explained to Violet.

The house was newly arranged, its decoration and furniture were all in excellent taste, though there was not the stamp of advanced culture and "high artiness" about everything which characterised Violet's most temporary tenting-place. Still, it was a cosy, comfortable, pretty

room, and the wealth of flowers Florence had bestowed on it gave it a touch of poetry and beauty that made it a very pleasant place in which to lounge away an hour or two on a hot summer's afternoon. So Mrs. Raymont and Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden sat on contentedly, the latter taking a lively interest in the life on the moor among the colts, which Florence described with sympathy and animation.

"It was such a fine, jolly life, you know," she said enthusiastically. "There was never a day of it that I hadn't my choice of two or three mounts, and the colts were all like friends to me. I've often cried when Uncle Joe has sold one of my favorites. I used to say—you know what nonsense girls talk—that I'd never marry a man who wouldn't let me live in the country and have a lot of horses, and now here I am in London, away from all my old friends, and as happy as possible."

"'Such thy power, O love,'" Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden quoted, looking with kind eyes at the girl who was still in love with her husband. And Florence smiled back into her visitor's eyes as she replied,

"Yes, it's enough for me that I am with Jack, though I tell him, and mean it too, that I'm not going to let being with him content me for ever and altogether. That would be bad for us both, and would make us a selfish isolated pair of people in no time. But he has led a very solitary kind of life, you know, till he married me. He has had no home, and no one to love him, so he has grown, or he *would* have grown misanthropic, if he hadn't me. Now I am going to train him to be sociable. He ought to like society, for he can be so charming, can't he, Mrs. Raymont?"

"You know I only saw him on his wedding-day. A man does not show to much advantage on that interesting occasion."

"I hope we may see Mr. Phillipps," Violet said politely.

"I hope he'll come home, but that's doubtful," Florence explained.

Then she went on to tell them how distressed she had been by the disappearance of all the porcelain, panel, and cabinet portraits of him that had been adorning her rooms.

"The servants *must* have stolen them," Mrs. Raymont was saying, while Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden listened with sympathetic interest to the story of the loss that was so distressing to the young wife.

"The only one I have left of him now," said Florence pathetically, tugging at a short gold chain she wore round her neck, "is this miniature, which I had copied from one that was taken in Plymouth more than a year ago."

She did not detach the chain from her throat, but held the locket towards Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden, who stooped down to look at it. Florence had turned her head aside to speak to Mrs. Raymont, so she was mercifully spared the sight of the expression of mingled anger and anguish which distorted and disfigured Violet's lovely face for a moment or two.

Then she looked back with the careless question,

"What do you think of him?" on her lips, as Violet pushed the locket hurriedly back into her hand, and called hoarsely and with an effort to her child:

"Jack, come here."

CHAPTER XXIX.

FLEEING FROM THOUGHT.

In the first burning flash of fear and fury with which Violet recognised her false husband's likeness, her brain whirled so madly that she lost sight of expediency for an instant, and felt only wildly eager to denounce him. But the next instant she remembered that this man, though he deserved the worst fate that could befall him at her hands, was little Jack's father, and at any cost the knowledge of *what his father was* must be kept from little Jack.

She had called to her boy unconsciously, and when he came running to her in alarm, she had turned from him and reached her hand out to take hold of the back of a friendly chair, and surrendered herself to a brief period of physical and mental torpor that was not exactly faintness, but that rendered her incapable of speech or action for a few minutes. During these few minutes, while the others busied themselves in getting cold water, *eau de Cologne*, and in holding strong salts under her nose, she was able to force herself to think what it would be best to do in the present.

The future should be considered in time. But the "present"—she and she only must deal with that.

"His name and character must be saved for my boy's sake."

These words seemed to write themselves legibly before her eyes, and as she read she recovered her faculties and spoke.

"I have been doing a little too much running about in the heat, I fancy," she said, turning her face towards her young hostess in explanation, but not raising her eyes.

She could not bring herself yet to look kindly on the one who had superseded her.

"I hope I have not given you much trouble. If you will kindly send for a cab——"

She rose from the chair into which she had subsided when the faintness seized her, and was walking towards the door before Florence could answer. But the latter, though she was surprised and a trifle hurt at the abrupt manner of her guest, was not disconcerted.

"Certainly I will send for a cab. Hadn't you better sit and rest till it comes? The stand is some distance from here."

"But my carriage is at the door," Mrs. Raymont interposed. "Surely, dear Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden, you will let me drive you home? I should feel wretchedly anxious if you went alone——"

"I have Jack; I don't want anyone else. *Please* let me go," Violet pleaded piteously.

Then being conscious that they were exchanging glances of amazement at her curiously changed manner, she forced herself to look at Florence and say:

"Do forgive me for being rather captious. I have had much to try me lately. Life has been very hard——"

She stopped suddenly as she saw tears of pity spring into her rival's eyes, and held her hand out.

"Don't cry for me, you can't help my misery," she murmured, and then, to the confused surprise of both Mrs. Raymont and Florence, Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden almost ran from the room.

"Now what is it? Tell me, dear," said Mrs. Raymont when, a few minutes after this, she and Violet were driving rapidly towards the hotel in which the latter was staying.

"A shock! I can't explain it," Violet replied briefly.

"A shock," Mrs. Raymont repeated meditatively.

Then she turned her face away as she thought:

"The likeness in the locket reminded her of someone, probably. I wonder if that 'someone' was her precious husband? If he *has* a twin brother anywhere about in the world, I should say that Florence Arle has gone into legal slavery to that gentleman."

But as she kept these thoughts to herself, Violet was not obliged to combat them.

As soon as Violet reached her temporary quarters, she delivered Jack up to the charge of her maid, and herself up to the woeful task of facing the horrible truth in all its ugly nakedness, and considering how best to treat it; how to deport herself with due regard to her boy's present happiness and future dignity and honor.

"He must never know that his father is a base bad man, who has committed a crime for which I could send him into penal servitude."

This was the determination to which she had come even

in those horrible moments of faintness, with Florence's pure kind eyes searching her face and seeming to read her secret. From this determination she did not waver for a second, but for hours her mind was tossed about and torn by a multitude of conflicting resolutions and considerations of various policies to be pursued towards that other woman, who was living in sin, believing herself to be his wife.

It was hard to come to a decision in the matter without taking counsel of any one, and Violet dared not take anyone into her confidence, therefore the decision must be the work of her own unassisted judgment, she felt. At one time she thought she would go to her husband and tell him she had made the discovery of his shame and sin and dishonor, and implore him to break the bonds of wickedness which he had forged, and leave that other woman.

Then again, she reflected—that if he did this without assigning the true cause of his conduct to his innocent victim, it would be simply brutality, which would justify that other woman's friends in hunting him down and exposing him. On the other hand, if he made full confession to that other woman, she would probably expose him at once, and so bring shame upon little Jack. No, she could not with safety to little Jack adopt either of these courses, nor in fact could she adopt any course save that of perfect quiescence.

"God helping me, I will never see him again," she said to herself at last, "but I will keep his guilty secret from the world and from his child."

Then she cried passionately over the cruel awakening she had had from that dream of love and happiness which had begun on that night, long ago, when Sir Lionel Halford brought his friend to her coming-out ball.

There had been an engagement made for her to spend the evening with her father and mother; but now she felt

that it would be impossible for her to face them, and listen to their kind sympathetic enquiries as to the prospects of pleasanter relations ever existing again between herself and her husband. She must wait for time to compose her mind on the matter of expedience before she could successfully deceive her mother. It was hard enough to deceive her most precious little son, who was constantly enquiring "why papa didn't come home like he used to." The strain of perpetual deception to be kept up for the good of others was beginning to tell on her nerves already. She started at shadows, and felt a sense of coming evil gliding down upon her every time a spider ticked behind a dusty picture, or a simple magpie flew athwart her path.

This nervously excited state of feelings had been her portion down at Houndell ever since her inheritance of the property had given her husband an excuse for casting her off, in an affectedly jealous rage.

It was no wonder then that now, when a worse thing than she had imagined had come to pass, that nervous terrors claimed her for their own to a painfully exaggerated degree.

During all the years she had lived in and near London it had never happened that she had once been to a theatre alone. She had always shrank from doing so; but this night the idea of going to a place where she would be alone, unwatched, unquestioned, and perhaps diverted from her own sorrowful thoughts, had an infinite charm for her. So she gave the order for a stall to be secured for her, naming almost the first theatre whose name she thought of. And when the time came she went to it, and took her seat before the little farce that preceded the piece of the evening was finished. The stalls filled rapidly this night, and when the curtain rose on the first scene of *As in a Looking-Glass*, the only ones vacant were the two next to that occupied by Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden.

Florence had been a little puzzled and a good deal distressed by the sudden indisposition and sudden departure of the guest whom she had been so glad to welcome and so delighted to recognise as the lovely woman who had made such an impression upon her long ago at the Plymouth photographer's. The change from the undisguised liking with which Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden had regarded her at first, to the barely concealed aversion which marked Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden's manner after her recovery from her brief faintness, struck Florence as being capricious and almost insolently ill-bred.

"I never want to see Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden in my house again, Jack," she exclaimed when her husband came home rather late for dinner that evening. "I have so much to tell you, I hardly know where to begin. In the first place an awful thing has happened; someone has stolen your photographs, every one of them——" She paused in anger, for he had thrown himself back in his chair, and was laughing loudly, "artificially" she thought.

"Poor little woman, have I given you a fright," he said presently. Then he told her that "for a joke," he had hidden his photographs, and affected to be very much amused at the anxiety she had undergone.

"I fail to see the joke," she said coldly, when he affected to recover himself; "you have caused me to be unjust to the servants, for I accused them of carelessness, if not worse, and declared they must have left the doors open and have allowed thieves to get into the house. I am not a child, Jack—the joke was unworthy of you."

"Don't be cross, my darling," he said, becoming gravely penitent in a moment. "I won't make a fool of myself in that way again. Forgive me, and let me enjoy my dinner. We haven't much time to spend over it, for I've got stalls for the Bernard Beere to-night——"

"Oh, I've wanted to see her in that piece so much," she said eagerly, forgetting her indignation at having been

fooled at the prospect of seeing a play that was the talk of the town in those days. "But just listen, Jack, I want to tell you. Mrs. Raymont brought her friend Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden and a dear little boy—such a duck of a chap. I wish you had seen him. And at first Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden was as nice as possible, but the heat made her faint or ill or something, and then she got almost rudely impatient to be off. She walked off in such a hurry that she forgot to say good-bye to me."

"Indeed! what upset her?" he forced himself to ask.

"I don't know, unless it was the scent of the flowers. I have a lot of tuberoses and gardenias on the mantelpiece and all about the room. By-the-way, there's the bill, the flowers came to more than I thought they would. I meant to have made a floral shrine for your big porcelain portrait, you know. I wanted to show you to my visitors. As it was, the only likeness I could find of you was the one I have in my locket."

His lips felt curiously dry; he could hardly compel them to ask:

"And did you exhibit that to your guests?"

"Indeed I did——"

"Good God!" he ejaculated.

Then, her look of amazed consternation recalling him to himself, he added:

"The amount of your flower bill staggered me, my darling. Five pounds for a few flowers for your drawing-room is rather a large order."

"Oh, is that all? you frightened me so." she said sighing with relief. "I won't be so extravagant again."

"No wonder your visitor fainted, or whatever it was she did," he went on agitatedly. "The atmosphere must have been sickening. We mustn't loiter about now, darling. I'll smoke my cigarette while you're putting on your cloak, and we'll start at once. I don't want to miss the first scene."

"Nor do I," she cried, as she ran off to get ready, forgetful of Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden's faintness, and of Jack's startling exclamation when he saw the bill for the flowers.

CHAPTER XXX.

"SHE IS BLAMELESS."

When Mr. Phillipps-Twysden found that his wife had spared him, even though she must have recognised his likeness in the locket which poor Florence had so proudly exhibited, his first emotion was one of profound admiration for the self control displayed by the woman whom he had deserted.

This phase of feeling quickly passed, however, and was succeeded by one of nervous apprehension and doubt of the integrity of Violet's motive. Perhaps she was only making a feint of resignation and forbearance. Probably she only acted in this way to lull suspicion and inveigle Florence into further intimacy in order the more effectually to overthrow and confound the latter, and irretrievably disgrace himself. It would be only a fair and just reprisal if she did do this, he admitted to himself. But yet it would not be like Violet to act basely, even for the sake of justly punishing a gross offender.

Somewhat comforted by this remembrance of her character, he went on to persuade himself that "her beastly pride would be his surest safeguard."

"She will never let the world know that I preferred another woman to her, so she'll wink at the wickedness rather than let it be known that I got weary of her."

Still, though he argued himself into the belief that Violet would endure her wrongs in silence and never expose him he dreaded nothing so much as the possibility of meeting her face to face. He pictured her face with its expression

of sadness and scorn. He framed a hundred speeches for her, strong burning words of reproach and wrath together and fancied he heard her uttering them. He almost saw the action with which she would withdraw his little son from his contaminating influence.

And as the picture grew on the canvas of his imagination he talked fast and rather incoherently to Florence in a vain attempt to blot it out.

He longed for the play that night. He longed for the distraction to his sombre, sorrowful, remorseful, thoughts, which would be mercifully given him by the powerful acting of Mrs. Bernard Beere. Above all he longed for his period of easy silence which would be his portion while all Florence's attention was being given to the stage. To be able to sit and brood over his sins and the complications in which these had involved him, seemed a restful prospect now to the unhappy, short-sighted fool, who had wrecked three lives that had been launched under the fairest auspices.

"I will forget, and be happy for to-night at least," was the substance of his thoughts as he jumped out of the hansom at the door of the theatre, and helped Florence down.

How pretty—how more than pretty—she looked in the long softly-falling cloak of terra-cotta plush, that lent itself readily to the lines of her graceful figure. How proud he would be to introduce her to any chance acquaintance as "My wife." But this he knew he dare not do to those who knew him as Phillipps-Twysden. Florence must perforce appear under a cloud. It half-maddened him to think that she should be supposed by anyone—even by the merest stranger—to be less pure and good and honest than she really was. But circumstance is a mighty monarch, and Phillipps-Twysden realised that in this pitiful case he could not confront circumstance.

Meanwhile, Violet had forced herself to be interested

in what was passing before her. The farce played was a mere trifle, but it had the merits of being witty and of being admirably played. The mere endeavor to force herself to be amused was good for her aching, bewildered brain. And as the curtain dropped on the last scene of the farce she realised with momentary pleasure that the pain had ceased, and that a stall immediately in front of her was being taken by Sir Lionel Halford.

The idea entered her mind that she would allow him to remain in ignorance of her proximity. But presently, seeing that he turned half round to scan the boxes, she touched him on the shoulder, and in an instant he was recognising her and expressing his delight at meeting her.

"If one of those stalls next to you stands vacant much longer I shall come and take it," he told her when they had exchanged a few sentences. "I didn't know you were in town again. I heard from Lady Susan that you meant to live entirely at Houndell. Is that so? and how does Twysden like the prospect of being the country squire?"

"My husband will not live at Houndell," Violet began.

Then she paused. Should she tell this staunch old friend, this man who had once loved her so well, and to whom she believed she was still dearer than any other woman—should she tell him how her idol has fallen, shattering in its fall all her life's happiness. No! She resolved she could not bring herself to tell him everything. There would be danger in that to little Jack's father, so she would keep her whole counsel and tell him nothing.

"When do you go down?" he asked after a moment's pause.

The house was rapidly filling now for *As in a Looking Glass*, and he was turning round for a final chat before the curtain rose.

As he did so he caught sight of a lady and gentleman making their way along the row in which Violet was towards the two vacant seats by her side. They were still at some distance and two or three obstructingly stout bodies sat in their way and hindered their progress. It was but a momentary glimpse he gave them but it was enough to show him that Violet's husband and the pretty girl who had so attracted him (Sir Lionel) when in Devonshire in the early spring were advancing upon Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden and himself in absolute unconsciousness.

He gave a glance of terror at Violet. What if there should be a scene?

In another instant he was reassured on this point. Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden, after one swift glance at the pair, who little guessed that she was there to see them, said to him rapidly and imperatively:

"Be guided absolutely by my manner. *She* is blameless."

He could only promise obedience by a look; but he felt that the drama to be presently enacted behind him would be of more absorbing interest to him that the one he had come to see on the stage.

As Florence subsided into her stall she recognised her neighbor, and Phillipps Twysden was first made aware of the presence of his wife by hearing Florence say:

Oh, Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden, I am so glad to see you are better. Let me introduce my husband to you."

Violet turned her head slowly and smiled strangely, Florence thought. Then she inclined her head very slightly towards the man who sat turned to stone, as it seemed, on the other side of Florence.

But at last she found her voice and answered the enquiry.

"I am well again, thank you. At least—not well enough to sit out the whole of Lena Despard's career of crime. I shall ask you to take me out presently, and find

a cab for me, Sir Lionel," she added, aloud, thus obliging him to turn round again and confront the villain who was ruining the lives of the only two women who had ever won tender thoughts from Lionel Halford. As the two men's eyes met, the insignificant little baronet looked the infinitely grander fellow of the two.

"Perhaps you do not know Mr. and Mrs. Phillipps," Violet forced herself to say, and he detected the ring of heart-broken appeal in her tones. "You have met Mrs. Phillipps before? Indeed, how singular, how very singular that we should all meet by chance in this way. By chance, by happy cruel chance."

"You are going to be ill again. Jack, help her," Florence cried excitedly, as Violet's voice grew fainter and fainter, and the words she uttered were evidently spoken with rapidly increasing difficulty. But Violet put aside the proffered aid, and staggered wearily to her feet.

"Come out with me, Sir Lionel," she said. "Take me home to my mother's house; I think I am going to have an illness. I shall be better with my mother."

Sir Lionel rose at once, and made his way out quickly to meet her; and Violet drew her garments closely round and swept swiftly, with averted head, past her husband. As she disappeared without a word of leave-taking, Florence said angrily:

"What strange manners that woman has. I don't think she can be quite right in her head. She stared like an imbecile at you when I introduced you. And how funny of her to be alone at a theatre, and to order that little man about as if he were her own private property. Why isn't her husband here, I wonder? Do you know, Jack, I don't think she can be quite a good woman, in spite of all Mrs. Raymont says about her. Do you?"

"I don't want to think about her at all."

"How odd you are too, Jack."

"My dear child, I am here to enjoy Mrs. Bernard

Beere's acting, not worry my brain with vain speculations about—about Mrs. Raymont and her friends. That's a jolly gown, isn't it; wouldn't you like to have one cut on the same lines, Flo? I'm rather tired of your tailor-made neat fits for the home; I want to see you in something voluminously flowing, by way of a check."

"In a tea-gown, in fact?" she said, falling into the trap unsuspiciously. "But you see, Jack, habits are more in my line. When is Uncle Joe going to send my horse up, I wonder? I'm longing to be in the saddle again. Can you take a holiday soon? If you can we might run down to Eastmoor, and see dear mother and all of them, and fetch the gee."

"I'm tired; but I'll give you leave to go without me for a few days if you care to do so."

"As if I would go without you. Indeed, no; you're not going to get rid of me in that way yet, Jack. I'll ask Uncle Joe to send one of the boys up with the horse, and then I shall begin my explorations on horseback over the fair countries of Middlesex and Surrey. There's another lovely dress—that's the one I'd like to have copied, if you really will let me be so extravagant."

"Be as extravagant as you like," he said, scarcely knowing what he was saying. The shock of finding himself suddenly confronted with his wife without any chance of escaping the fatal exposure which he felt sure must follow, had shattered his nerves to an extent that almost alarmed himself. His head and hands were trembling as if he had had a palsy stroke. His thoughts and his words were at odds. He fell that he could not exercise a safe control over the latter, and so he grew irritable when some remark of Florence's seemed to demand an answer.

At last he could bear it no longer. The whole scene swam before his eyes, and the voices got farther and farther away from him each moment,

"I must have air," he gasped, and with that he strug-

gled to his feet and staggered out, followed by Florence, who even in her alarm felt a good deal of annoyance at the fainting tendencies of those who had come in contact with her this day.

But she reproached herself with having felt this annoyance when, having reached home, Mr. Phillipps grew feverish and wild in both manner and appearance. Before morning he was raging in a violent attack of brain fever, through which for several days the poor girl nursed him alone. During his moments of madness—and they were many—he perpetually called on Florence to protect him from "that woman," but he never mentioned that woman's name, and so Florence neither identified her with Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden, nor attached much importance to his ravings.

"It's someone he knew *long* before he married me," she told herself, as she tended him with unshaken confidence and undiminished affection.

While she was unwearingly tending him through the most trying phases of his most trying illness, and nursing him back to convalescence, she more than once encountered Sir Lionel Halford in the course of that hour of exercise which she was compelled to give herself daily.

The first time they met he would have passed her with a mere bow, but this the girl, ignorant of his motive and of the feelings which inspired his action, would not permit.

"Don't you remember me?" she asked, and before he could reply she went on, "I was Florence Arle, you may remember, and now you know I'm Mrs. Phillipps. My poor husband has been awfully, really *awfully* ill; but he is better now, and the doctor gives me quite bright hopes of him. He was taken ill that night I saw you at the theatre with Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden. Don't you remember?"

Sir Lionel "remembered perfectly."

"Well, when we went home that night he was very strange, shivered and rambled, and at last raved. I was nearly heart-broken, and didn't know to whom to turn. You see," she went on in a burst of confidence that touched him to the heart, "you see, when I married I came away from all my own people, and Jack has now no relations at all, so I'm very much alone."

Sir Lionel listened, and was sorely exercised in mind. Could this girl really be as good and innocent as she looked and seemed or was she a practised hypocrite, pretending to be a wife when she knew that she had no claim to the honored title? He remembered the dramatic meeting between Phillipps-Twysden and his real wife at the theatre. He remembered how Violet had insisted on his (Sir Lionel's) being guided by her manner, and he recalled the words in which she had assured him that this girl whom appearances were so fearfully against, was blameless.

In the face of all the evidence that went to prove poor Florence guilty, he struggled to retain his faith in her. But one question he would ask.

"You were married rather privately, I presume?"

"Yes, quite; only my mother was present at my wedding," she said simply.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE DUCHESS TO THE RESCUE.

In the face of that simple, spontaneous statement, Sir Lionel stood abashed and contrite. How could he have dared to suspect a girl with such a face as hers of being a commonplace, vulgar victim to a man's perfidy. She could never be a party to a low, immoral intrigue. He felt quite convinced of that now, as he looked surreptitiously at the clear, delicate outline of her cheek and chin, seen in profile as she walked quickly along by his side.

"You see," she began, after a minute's pause, slackening her pace to speak to him, "I was hurried by a lot of little events, that were each unimportant taken singly, into marrying in a great hurry. It wasn't at all the sort of wedding I wanted to have, but it was all for the best, I'm sure now. If we hadn't married when we did, poor Jack would have been alone in this terrible illness, with no one to take care of him."

How devoutly Sir Lionel wished that this had been the case. Still for her sake he suppressed his feelings and tried to seem to agree with her. To his own surprise—almost to his horror—he found himself pitying this nearly strange young woman quite as heartily and as tenderly as for many a long month he had pitied Violet. He knew that in doing so he was disloyal to his first love, but for the life of him he couldn't help himself.

"The girl is a darling. She must be saved from this life of degradation and misery, and at the same time she must be spared the knowledge that it *is* such a life," he told himself quixotically, racking his brains to think of a reason for removing Florence from the position she was so proudly and fondly occupying, without at the same time arousing alarm or suspicion in her mind.

She meanwhile recognising that he was feeling kindly towards her, little as he said, went on chattering as unreservedly and comfortably as if he had been an old woman, or one of Uncle Joe's stable-boys.

"Now that he's getting better I feel my position more than I thought it was possible I ever could have felt it before he got ill. It's dull work for a man having no one but his wife to speak to, and not one of Jack's acquaintances have been near him yet—isn't it odd? His clerk has been on business once, but of course, I wouldn't let him see my husband. I told him to act on his own responsibility for the best in the interests of the house till he heard from Mr. Phillipps or me, and you should have

seen how he stared at me. I shall tell Jack I didn't like that head clerk of his."

"Why didn't you send for your mother?" Sir Lionel asked vaguely.

He had an idea that he was answering Florence instead of merely following out his own train of thought.

"Because"—she paused, her eyes flashed as she turned her crimsoning face towards him, but she would tell out the truth, hard as it was to her—"because my husband has told me not to do it. He won't have anyone about him but me and the nurse. I told him my mother would be a help to me, but as he disliked the idea of her coming I couldn't worry him, and so I gave it up. The truth is, I suppose he wants the society of a man. Now, would you come and see him and try to cheer him up, one day? It would be doing me a kindness."

"Perhaps he wouldn't care to see me?"

"I don't think he'd mind, really I don't," she said frankly. "You see, you're a stranger to him, and would suggest fresh trains of thought, and that's what is needful to him now, the doctor says. Both the doctors say that he must have had some great shock on the top of some long-continued worry and anxiety, and that has overdone him. It must have been some business shock and worry, for I can answer for it that he has had no domestic trouble. I do wish you would come in unexpectedly and try to divert his mind."

"You're very kind. I mean I would do anything in my power to help you, but——"

Sir Lionel stammered, and finally broke down helplessly. To go and visit the man whose cause she was pleading with such touching trust and confidence was impossible; equally impossible was it to refuse any request of hers made in that ringing brave young voice, and with that little impatient knitting of the brows that had so bewitched him when he looked at her first by the side of the anemone

bed in the old-fashioned vicarage garden away in the heart of Devonshire.

"I will try to do as you wish—I will try to please you," he managed to say, and then Florence relaxed her earnest brows and laughed aloud.

"Don't speak so solemnly about such a trifle as a call," she said cheerfully; "and please forgive me if in my desire to cheer up my husband I forgot what a much more important member of society you are than we claim to be. Of course you must have half a hundred demands on your time of which I don't even as much as dream. Still if you can spare half-an-hour one day soon, do come and see him and tell him club news. Now, I must go in. We are close to our house—this is my number. Don't forget it."

"I shall never forget it," he said impressively.

Then she ran up the steps and into the house, and he walked on wondering what he ought to do.

"The brute's a bigamist, and that sweet wife of his will wear her heart out in silence hiding his sin and saving him from the punishment he so richly deserves."

All his pity, all his sympathy were with Violet as he thought this. The next moment he forgot her, and dwelt only on the miserable sacrifice that Florence was making of her life.

"She is not like Violet. If once she finds out that she has been wronged and tricked and deceived, she'll cast him out from her heart, and take her revenge. Well, I hope she'll be enlightened before long, goor girl; but on my word, I shouldn't care to be the one to enlighten her. What a hound the fellow is, and what an unhappy hound he must be now if his brain is clear enough to remember what he has done. I should like to tell Susan about it, but I'm morally bound to secrecy, and so I must puzzle out the question of what I am to do in this miserable matter unassisted."

He was a very wealthy and important and much sought and highly favored member of society, nevertheless it is the fact that he was a very unhappy and greatly bewildered little man in these days. He could rarely detach his thoughts from one or the other of the two women who had so impressed themselves upon his heart, and he dared not discuss them and their difficulties with Lady Susan Meadows. As for some long time he had been accustomed to take all his troubles, trials, triumphs, and interests to that genial and sympathetic lady, his inability to take her into his confidence in this matter was a piece of self-restraint that fretted him considerably.

Especially did he find it hard to maintain a guardedly safe reserve when Lady Susan would elect to make Violet and her affairs her theme. The two ladies kept up a moderately regular and exhaustive correspondence, and though Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden never mentioned her absent husband, Lady Susan chose to read between the lines and declare that his incomprehensible conduct was destroying the peace of Violet's life.

"I can't think that he can have run away with someone else, or we should have heard something about it; yet it seems an odd thing to leave his wife in that way, unless there is another woman in the case," she speculated, addressing Sir Lionel, who was redder than usual from the conscious guilt of deceit.

"I don't care to think about the fellow at all," he said curtly.

"He always gave me the idea of being a cool, hard kind of a man, but I should never have thought him a vicious one," Lady Susan went on. "Violet won't answer any of my delicate hints or downright questions about him. She just ignores them, and it's so provoking. I asked her once if she wanted me to think that there were faults on her side as well as on his, and she told me I could please myself about it. Do you ever run across Phillipps-Twys-

den anywhere, or has he ceased to visit any of the haunts of men?"

"I never see him."

"Does that mean that you won't see him? Is he a person to be looked through—not at? Tell me, because if you don't give me a good reason for not doing so, I shall certainly stop him if ever I see him and ask him outright why he doesn't go back to that dear wife of his who adores him."

"I think you had better not."

"I am not often influenced by a mere sense of expediency. If you want me to cut Phillipps Twysden you must give a good reason for doing so, and I'll do it; but I'll not render a blind obedience even to your wishes, my friend."

"I am bound in honor to keep my wishes a secret," he said, and Lady Susan laid her hand on his shoulder, and looked him frankly in the face, as she said—

"Now listen to me; we are real staunch friends, and we have never tried to deceive each other yet, don't begin doing it now. Are you still so *miserably weak* about Violet that you are actually allowing her husband to carry on an intrigue in the hopes that it may attain such proportions that she *must* at last notice it and claim her liberty. Because if you are, I despise you."

"I must submit to your judgment. I can say nothing to refute it save this, that I have ceased to have any feeling beyond friendship and pity for Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden."

"Do you mean to tell me that if poor Violet were free and would have you, you wouldn't want to marry her now."

"On my honor, I can assure you that I have no more desire to marry Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden, granting that she were free as air, and would have me, than I have to marry——"

"Me, let us say," she said, laughingly filling up the pause. "Well, Lal, I am bound to believe you, but still I ask *why* do you screen the husband?"

"Don't ask."

"Well, I won't, if my apparent cessation from curiosity on the subject gives you a particle of pleasure. Now I must entertain some of the other people, and you may go and talk to mamma."

This conversation took place on one of many evenings which found Sir Lionel a guest at Meadfort House. He was there daily, in fact, and had grown quite accustomed to being treated with a mixture of fondness and freedom by the duchess, who still intended to have him for her son-in-law eventually. It seemed to her that she had seen several signs of an approaching surrender on the part of this extremely eligible man lately. It was not only that he came to the house constantly, but he always appeared a trifle thrown out of gear if he could not manage a little quiet conversation with Susan. If he were forced by the exigencies of etiquette to devote his attention to any other lady than Susan when the latter was present, he always looked anxious to be released, and the first use he invariably made of his freedom was to get near Susan.

"He doesn't know it himself, but he can't do without her," the duchess often said to herself; and she was more fully persuaded of this truth than ever on this special evening, for Sir Lionel's eyes seemed to follow Lady Susan's every movement with a hungry gaze. The fact was, he longed to go on talking on the dangerons topic of the Phillipps-Twysdens—and this not because of any old romance about Violet, but because he could think of little else, save them and their connection with Florence. So he seized every opportunity of skating about the subject with Lady Susan, and when she moved away from him, his eyes followed her in watchful, anxious expectancy of her return. No wonder the duchess thought his demeanor

highly promising; and no wonder that thinking this, and being a woman of prompt action in such matters, she should have made up her mind to give him a few words of encouragement that might speed him on his wooing.

Accordingly, when in obedience to Lady Susan's orders, he went over to the duchess' side, and prepared to entertain her with polite conversation, that lady said affably:

"I almost know what you're going to say to me. I've seen it coming for a long time, and I won't pretend to be surprised. You and Susan have settled it at last, I see; and, my dear Halford, I can't tell you how glad I shall be to have you for a son. There, there, don't trouble yourself to explain; I understand, and I needn't tell you that you'll have no trouble with the duke—he'll be as pleased as I am."

CHAPTER XXXII.

AN ALTERNATIVE.

Sir Lionel had made two or three ineffectual attempts to arrest the stream of the duchess' eloquence, and had felt himself a brute for doing so. When from sheer want of breath she came to a full stop, he knew that the crisis had come, and that he must either cut himself adrift ungratefully from these kindly people for ever, or take the fate she proffered him. The former prospect loomed far too dismally for him to contemplate it for more than a moment. After all, where in the weary waste of fashionable life would he find another friend like Lady Susan? Nowhere! Such women are not often reared on society's hot-beds, he reminded himself; and he must forget her as a friend after what her mother had said, unless he secured her as a wife.

"You are only too good to me," he managed to say; and the duchess, who was spilt very far back in her chair, managed to heave forward and put her hand on his arm.

"I should be a cruel mother if I didn't rejoice in the happiness that has come to my daughter at last. Susan's heart has been craving for this for many a year. Don't thank me; I am a selfish old woman, and I honestly confess that I would much rather see my daughter the mistress of a place like Halford than "in maiden meditation" on a narrow income, when her father dies. And Susan will be a good wife to you; she knows she isn't your first love, and she won't expect you to be slavishly adoring as your first love would have done, probably. But she'll be a good wife to you; she knows she's plain, and so she'll be all the more grateful to you for having over-looked the plainness."

This was being "honest" with a vengeance. Sir Lionel's heart palpitated in kindly indignation as he heard the plain truth from her mother's lips, relative to the lack of charms of his bride elect.

"Poor Susan," he thought, "she's often had to hear that she's no beauty, I'm afraid. How surprised she'll be to find she's engaged to me. Wonder if I'd better go and prepare her? or shall I keep quiet and give the old lady the pleasure of letting loose the news."

It was easier to sit still and listen to her grace's complacent remarks than to ramble after Susan with an explanation. So he placidly sat still, wondering why, as he had done it now, he hadn't done it before, hazily hoping that Susan would be so happy that she would refrain from questioning him about the decline and fall of his love for Violet; and rather indignant with himself for wishing that he had saved Florence Arle from the woeful fate that had overtaken her by marrying her himself.

"Don't let me keep you here if you want to go and talk to Susan," said the contented mother affably, after a short pause.

"Oh, not at all," the philosophic lover replied promptly.

The duchess laughed and remarked:

"Susan and you have let the time of romance slip over your heads, but I don't know that you're either of you to be pitied for that. A good, calm, reasonable affection, founded on esteem and thorough knowledge of each other's character, is, perhaps, the best thing to start with in married life."

"I've no doubt of my own happiness and good fortune, at any rate, and I'll do my best to make up to her for having let the time of romance slip by."

Then he got up, and after a slight *détour*, made in order to collect his faculties before he broached the subject to Susan, he made his way over to her.

"What a long gossip you've had witn mamma. What has it all been about? You looked so hopelessly dejected once or twice that I thought of coming to the rescue."

"Then my looks were faithless expositors of my feelings. I was and am very happy. The duchess congratulated me on our engagement—you won't disappoint her and reject me, because she discovered it before we knew it ourselves—will you?"

He spoke so seriously and so deferentially that she knew he was in earnest.

"Mamma has hastened the conclusion upon you by something she has said, or forced it upon you altogether. Is it so? Don't dread telling me the truth. We are such real friends that we can always speak the truth to one another."

"And the truth—I am happy to say it—is that I wish it to be as your mother suspected. You won't fail me, will you, Susan? I have allowed her to suppose that we have quite settled it. She will think me an arrogant, presumptuous fool if she finds that I have assumed security before I had your word for it that it was established between us."

"You put things very kindly for mamma and me," she

said thoughtfully; "but how about yourself? Think of yourself for a minute, you good, unselfish fellow, before you declare yourself ready to forget the one woman of your life—your love for Violet Grove—and marry me."

"Violet Grove doesn't exist, and Violet Phillipps-Twysden is as unattainable as the stars above us. I respect, admire, almost reverence her still, but I have been a fool not to admit to myself long ago that all the romance concerning her has died out in my heart. Her memory will never intervene between us, dear."

He spoke affectionately, and Lady Susan had loved him very dearly for a very long time. It was surely not a very extraordinary thing that she should have accepted the chance of happiness planned after her own design.

"Then if I can make you half as happy as being your wife will make me, you will be a happy man, Lionel."

"Thank you, dear," he said quietly; and so this engagement was ratified without much enthusiasm, perhaps, but with a good deal of well-assured confidence and satisfaction on both sides.

Two or three days after this, everyone who was interested in either of them read without surprise that "a marriage has been arranged between Sir Lionel Halford, baronet, of Halford, Blankshire, and Lady Susan Meadows, fourth daughter of the Duke of Meadford. The marriage will take place shortly."

Among others Mr. Phillipps-Twysden read, and thought exultantly, "whether I die or not before, Violet will never marry that fellow now."

Though he had let his love for Violet turn to the hatred that the wicked are apt to feel against those whom they have injured, he still grudged her to Sir Lionel.

For many days after that miserable meeting at the theatre, Mr. Phillipps felt as if he were merely breathing the air of freedom on sufferance. He could not realise the complete and perfect generosity of Violet's nature. He could not

force his reason to accept as a fact that mute assurance of forbearance which Violet had given him both by her silence when his miniature was shown by poor, innocent Florence, and by her (Violet's) refusal to recognise him at the theatre. He maligned her motives in his own mind to the extent of fearing that she was only holding her hand in order to strike him the more unerringly when she should have lulled him into a state of fancied security.

"She's a proud woman, and she'll be revenged on me some day or other," he thought, and then he dolefully pictured himself figuring in the dock first and in penal servitude afterwards as a bigamist.

"And my boy—my little Jack, will be destroyed by the same blow." To do him justice, this thought hurt him even more than did the idea of the "hard labor" which he knew to be his well-deserved portion. It did not occur to his guilt-dulled heart that in Violet's love for and pride in little Jack lay his (Phillipps-Twysden's) strongest safeguard. It would never be known through her that Jack's father was a cowardly, criminal breaker of the laws of God and man.

But as day after day passed over his head, and he still found himself free to come and go without let or hindrance from his only lawful wife, he began to conjure up spirits wherewith to haunt himself. Florence was altering. The change in her was so subtle that no casual observer or uninterested person could have perceived it. But he saw it and felt it in every fibre of his being, from the moment when, coming home one night, Florence failed to meet him with a welcoming kiss.

The omission marked an epoch in their lives.

He had come from the City a little earlier than usual, intending to ask her to go up the river and dine. When he came into a little room at the end of the big dining-room, which had been fitted up for her with such shades of salmony-pink and sage-blue as only Liberty can supply,

he found her sitting down, idle and listless—rare things with Florence.

"Have you been riding to-day, darling?" he asked, and as he asked it he stooped to meet her greeting kiss. But Florence was not prepared to render it him.

"I have been riding—not far though." She had taken off her hat and habit, leaving her hair in the rigidly neat but not attractive form in which she always disposed of it when bound for the saddle.

"Shall we run up the river and dine?"

He stood back, as if a trifle offended, as he gave his invitation. Apparently, Florence failed to grasp that her own manner was in fault, for she said chillingly—

"I don't feel inclined to move, but please don't stay at home on my account. I have several papers and a new book, and I can get through the evening very well alone."

"But I cannot," he said in gentler tones than he ordinarily used to any one in his power. "Come, Flo, dear; rouse yourself and come out with me on the river. It has been ghastly hot in the City to-day, and I feel that I shall eat no more dinner than I did luncheon if I stay at home."

"Do go," she interrupted, starting forward in her chair. "I shall like to feel that you're happy on the river. I thought I can't go with you, have made another appointment which I mean to keep, so I hope you won't be vexed with me for having made it."

"You are very free and independent, still I hope you will tell me where and with whom your appointment is made."

"With old Uncle Joe, at the Great Western Hotel, as soon as I can get away after dinner."

"Why doesn't the old churl come here to see you?"

"He doesn't say why."

"Then until he gives his reasons for refusing to visit his niece in her own house, I shall refuse to allow you to meet him out of it."

She knit her brows—not at him, but at the opposing influence of her life, and patted the floor with her foot for a few moments. Then she looked up brightly with a solution of the difficulty on her lips.

"*You* go instead of me, Jack. He says: 'If Mr. Phillipps will come and say to me, come and see my wife, your niece, at my house,' he will come. But not else."

"The old man must be daft to think I should go through such an idiotic formula for the sake of obtaining the doubtful blessing of his presence here."

"Don't get angry," she said calmly. "Does it strike you as an 'idiotic formula?' Don't use it if it does. Only if you won't go, I must go and see Uncle Joe, and you must go on the river and dine alone."

"You offer me a pleasant alternative."

"Surely, if you think it unpleasant, you will be gracious and invite Uncle Joe here."

"I will not be dictated to by an old chawbacon——"

"Who is my uncle—and has been my best friend and guardian since dear papa got helpless. Don't call him names, Jack; when you do you rouse something in me that I don't want to have roused—I *want* to go on feeling about you as I have begun; don't try to make me think things of you that you wouldn't have liked me to think before we were married?"

"Look here, Florence." He tried to speak with a stern gravity, tempered with the mercifulness of conscious power that would, he anticipated, overawe her, or at least silence further remonstrance and appeal from her. He remembered that it frequently had had this desired effect upon Violet, so with a few misgivings, he tried it on Florence now.

"Look here, Florence, you tell me that you wish to retain the opinion you formed of me before we married. Is that true?"

"Quite true."

"Did I then give you the impression that I was a weak fool?"

"Indeed, you did not, or I shouldn't have married you."

"Did you believe me then to be a man with a firm will, capable of carrying into effect views that I held to be correct?"

"You gave me the idea of being a man who would have his own way whenever he could, and I hope I gave you the idea of being a woman who would always surrender her will to your way when I felt and believed that way to be good."

"But you reserve your right of judgment, and cease to think my way good as it turns away from the direction you—or Uncle Joe in this instance—wish it to take."

"I am not so foolish, Jack. I only wish you first to pay my uncle, who has been so good to me, the slight compliment of inviting him to your house—to *our* home; and if you won't do that, I only wish that secondly, you will not object to my going to see him. Poor old man, he has done me nothing but kindness all my life. Don't even *seem* to wish me to slight him, or you will make me more miserable than you think, Jack."

"Do you care more for pleasing him than for pleasing me?"

"It could never please you that I should act meanly and ungratefully."

"Then I must, I suppose, say good-bye to the pleasant evening I had planned on the river?"

"Yes, do, like a dear, and go and bring Uncle Joe here."

"Not for worlds. I mean it would be better for you to go alone, if you will go. He will be able to poison your mind more effectually against me if I am not present."

"There is only one person in the world who could do that," she said, rising with a sigh, and when he asked her "Who that person was," she replied—

"Yourself."

As she was passing out of the room he caught her by both hands and turned her towards him.

"My love, my own darling Flo, don't leave me coolly, for heaven's sake. You don't know how I love you. You never will know for you'll never understand what I have done—what I have sacrificed to gain you."

"Then now you have gained me, sacrifice your paltry pride to keep me. Give the old horse-breaker a welcome to your house, because he is your wife's very dear old uncle."

"I'll do what you please about him to-morrow if he doesn't try his underhand tricks to upset me in your estimation to-night," he promised.

And with that they parted, he to take all his misgivings and nervous dreads on the river; and she to present herself to the scrutinizing gaze of Uncle Joe, who would, she feared, detect that her happiness was not founded on such a rock as she had professed to him that she had built it upon.

It was, perhaps, a little to be regretted that on her way to the Great Western Hotel she should have met Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden, who was parting at the entrance to the station with a short, stout, rubicund man, and a tall, pale lady, whom Florence recognised instinctively as the short, stout man's *fiancée*, Lady Susan Meadows.

As she approached the group with a bright frank smile and an extended hand, Violet glanced imploringly at Sir Lionel, who was, perhaps, quite as much agitated at the encounter as was Mrs. Phillipps-Twysden.

"Spare us both; think of my Jack," the latter contrived to whisper to Sir Lionel.

And the whisper was overheard by that most sensible and prudent of women, Lady Susan.

Sensible and prudent as she was, it nettled her that Sir Lionel's old love should make a private plea to him on behalf of herself and someone else without making an attempt to include Lady Susan herself in the *belle alliance*.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MR. PHILLIPPS ARRANGES THE END.

As Phillipps went away to enjoy himself upon the river, he knew that he was a deservedly disappointed man. Florence would never repay him for what she had cost him. She would want him to live an honest, open, high-toned life with her, and if he refused to do so she would live it without him.

Putting things in the fairest light that he could in order that he might get a fragment of enjoyment out of this mid-summer evening, he found that all that was left to him of special delusion which he had seen in a life with Florence was this—namely, that she would only go with him when she felt him to be quite right, and that she would very seldom do.

Finding that he had miscalculated both his own strength and hers, and that his prospect of a happy life as he had planned it was fast fading away, he found himself almost regretting that he had not conquered the evil inclinations which had beset and tempted him when he first commenced playing Faust to poor Florence's Marguerite.

More than this, he began to speculate whether it would be possible by sacrificing Florence entirely, by deserting her and leaving no trace of himself behind for her to follow up, to regain the right to re-enter the old life and persuade Violet to live again in apparent domestic peace if not felicity with him.

But he soon dismissed these idle speculations as to what might even now possibly be from his mind. Violet would not hold him up to shame and ignominy and heavy punish-

ment, richly as he merited these things, for their boy's sake. But she would hold aloof from him as she would from the deadly sins.

There was nothing, therefore, left for him but to make the best of his bad bargain. There was no escape from the daily routine of disappointments which Florence's higher nature would inflict upon him until the end.

Until the end! What would the end be for him, he wondered. He had never thought much about death: he had always been too full of plans for making his life agreeable to himself. But now that he was forced to face a few disagreeableness he fell to moodily wondering how the end would come to him.

The river ran clear and deep all round him, and death by drowning was not so miserably bad, he had heard people say who had been nearly drowned. The river was not a fleeting transitory channel of escaping from his troubles should they become unendurable. The river was always here—he need not avail himself of the friendly service it might do him to-day. He would wait, and give Florence an opportunity of retracing those obnoxiously pronounced opinions of hers, and of expressing in her actions some more of that patiently adoring, obedient love for him, for which he craved as ardently as if he had been a good man and deserved it.

Still, the idea of death by drowning clung hauntingly to him all the evening, which was an exceptionally hot one. It would be a cool soft sort of method of quitting existence, and just at present anything cool and soft had a special charm for him. And it could always be arranged by a man of strong practical common-sense so as to look accidental and not cowardly. Little Jack would never have to suffer the odium of being the child of a suicide if he should one day overbalance himself in a light boat and go under in one of the shady back waters of the Thames.

As he dined exquisitely at a little river-side hotel he

looked out with prophetic eyes and felt that he saw the end on the broad faithful waters that might be trusted to keep his secret so well—the secret he would so surely give them to keep unless Florence altered.

He had a more real sense of power about him now that he had made up his mind that the end should come in this way if he were driven to it. For instance, if that old chaw-bacon uncle of Flo's had poked his nose into any dangerous bit of Mr. Phillipps' past and communicated his discovery to Florence, he would just walk out of the house and let the waters wash him clean from all disgrace and difficulty. From that vantage-ground at the bottom of the deep his inanimate body could defy his accusers, and Florence could never have the heart when she realized that she had lost him to visit his sins on little Jack's head.

As he thought of that golden little head and of the lovely loving little fellow's endearing looks and ways, the muscles of his face twitched, and hot tears of unavailing remorse and self-pity stood in his eyes.

For the first time in his manhood he cried.

He tried to check the unwonted weakness by puffing vigorously at a cigar, and filling a pretty Bohemian glass full of Tokay. But the spirit of retrospect beat cigar and the golden dancing wine. The tears gathered and nearly blinded him, and then fell over his cheeks in hot, heavy drops. Undoubtedly his nerves were terribly tried and weakened by the surprises and shocks he had endured of late, and by the recollection of the Paradise from which he had cast himself out.

There had been far more sadness than joviality in his evening's outing to this point. But now he roused himself, and persuaded himself that the greater part of depression had been due to inanimation from want of food. The majority of the ghosts that had been haunting him would be—were, in fact—laid now that he had dined. Still, there was a certain quiet satisfaction to be derived from

that resolution he had come to about the river. But whatever was going to happen he must see little Jack once more before the end came.

He was conscious of a sort of qualm by and by when he stepped again into the boat, intending to pull back to Maidenhead and from thence to take train to town. Supposing the boat should capsize accidentally in reality this very night, and the end he had found such comfort in planning out come to him before he felt it to be needful. The feeling possessed him so strongly that he left the boat where she was, and went back the whole distance by train.

Florence was at home—had been at home for more than an hour. He looked at her so keenly that she returned his gaze with open-eyed amazement.

"What is it? Have I a smut on my nose?" she asked, and he knew by the words and the way in which they were uttered that she had not heard anything dangerous from her uncle.

He sat down by her side, and she leant her head on his shoulder while she questioned him as to the way in which he had spent his evening, and in return told him what had passed between Uncle Joe and herself.

"The dear old man seems lost in that big hotel. I did my best to get him to come home with me and stay here, but he can't do it, he says, till you have been to see him. Why don't you go, Jack? He has never done anything to hurt or vex you, has he? You surely might do it to please me."

"Why don't the old ruffian come here like a sensible uncle instead of dragging me to call on him? He has no business to be so punctilious."

"Don't despise him," she put in hastily. "You'll take your own way and please yourself about going to see him, but you shall not speak sneeringly of him to me."

She had sprung from her chair while speaking, and

now stood very erect, looking down upon him, as it seemed.

He had no wish to defy her, he had no wish to hasten the end, but he could not help asking :

"What would you do if I chose to sneer at him and made you listen to my sneers?"

"I shouldn't listen to them."

"You would be obliged to were I base enough to utter them."

"I should go away."

"Florence, yours is not a very patient love for me."

"It's better than a patient, unrepining, unexacting love would be for you, Jack. It's a love that only deals with what is manly and fine about you. When you step down from the pedestal nature meant you to stand upon, I step away from you."

He did not like to tell her that she had placed him upon a pedestal in her imagination for which he had never been designed by nature, who knew better. The longing to make the best of things while they lasted was upon him, and he gratified it, as he had always been accustomed to gratify his longings all his life.

"Don't stop away from me, even for a moment. You're looking very sweet and pretty to-night, Flo. I'll promise anything you please when you look like that at me. I'll go and call on Uncle Joe to-morrow, and entreat him to do me the honor of staying in my home instead of an hotel where he's not comfortable; and you shall repay me by letting me take you on the river and giving you a dinner at Richmond."

"Oh, no. Uncle Joe will come if you ask him, and I must stay at home and entertain him, and you ought to stay with him too, for one evening, at least."

"My dear child, that's pressing me a little too hard."

"Why, all the grace will go from your invitation unless you stay at home to welcome the coming guest, Jack."

"That's one of your absurd country notions. How on earth should I get through an evening with him? No! If he comes he'll be happier to have you to himself, and I'll dine at the club."

"Leaving me to face him with the fact of my husband not thinking it worth his while to show common courtesy to his country-bred wife's relations. Do you know, I am sorry to say he has got that idea already, Jack. He thinks you're either ashamed of him or——"

She paused in a sudden confusion that stung him even more than the unspoken words would have done.

"Or afraid of him. Is that what he prompted you to say to me?"

The studied sternness of his voice did not conceal from her that he was more than hurt and offended. He was startled also, and she saw it.

"You don't mean that you are? Oh, Jack!"

"That I am what—disgusted with Mr. Cadly for inspiring you with such contemptible suspicions? I am that undoubtedly."

"It wasn't that alternative that Uncle Joe suggested. It was your own word and your look that I answered. Uncle Joe only said that you were either ashamed of him or of yourself for having married me, and in the event of either being the case he wouldn't come here unless you went to him and showed by the way you asked him to your house that he was mistaken."

"You're sure that's all he said?"

"He said many more things, naturally, but I can't remember half of them."

There was silence for a few moments while she taxed her memory with the effort to find something inoffensive that Uncle Joe had said which it might be safe to repeat to her rather irritable auditor. At last she began with an air of relief.

"Oh, yes. One thing he told me that I'm sure you'll

be glad to hear. Mother's old friend, Mrs. Raymont, has made him such a good offer for a handsome, safe, well-broken Dartmoor pony for a little boy to ride. Uncle Joe happens to have the very thing just out of the breaker's hands."

"Has Mrs. Raymont any children?"

"No. It's for that dear little man who came here with his mother the other day, I fancy. Uncle Joe has only heard it's wanted for a little boy; but knowing how devoted Mrs. Raymont is to Mrs. Twysden I feel sure the pony is meant for little Jack."

"That woman is not going to have the impertinence to give the boy a pony, I hope."

"Now why should you hope anything about it, Jack? You hardly know 'that woman,' as you call dear Mrs. Raymont, and you don't know the little boy at all. Why shouldn't she give him a pony if she likes and his mother likes him to take it?"

He had forgotten caution in his momentary surrender to irritable indignation, but Florence's evident surprise at the emotion he had displayed recalled him to himself.

"Certainly I know of no reason against it except the natural distaste I should feel myself to your milliner giving our boy, if we had one, a pony."

"How often must I remind you that Mrs. Raymont is a gentlewoman first and before all things, and a milliner secondly. How jolly the little boy will look on that little brown, won't he? The brown is a perfect model little horse, you know, and the boy is so pretty. I wish you'd seen him, for I've made up my mind that he's the boy Mrs. Raymont wants the pony for."

She was so amused by her topic and by the word-picture she had painted of the pretty boy on the pony, with whom she was so familiar, that she did not notice the grey hopeless expression which settled down on Mr. Phillipps' face as she told him she wished he had seen the boy who was pretty.

His answering remark seemed to her to be entirely irrelevant,

"Poor little fellow! Poor little chap!" he said.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WORSE THAN WIDOWED.

MR. PHILLIPPS had not indulged in any vain hopes of a meeting of either a pacific or pleasing nature with Uncle Joe. He had felt a conviction which almost amounted to a certainty that the old man was entertaining some foul suspicion of his niece's husband which he had come up to town determined to sift to the bottom and verify, should it be capable of verification.

At the same time his niece's husband took this poor comfort to his heart, namely, that Florence's irascible old relative would never do anything that would disgrace and humiliate her publicly. As Violet was restrained from exposing him by her love for little Jack, so would the rough old colt breeder be by his love for his niece. Still, for all the assurance he felt with regard to his own ultimate safety, Mr. Phillipps-Twysden cut but a sorry figure even in his own eyes as he went into Mr. Cadly's presence.

Uncle Joe was in the library looking at the *Times*. He had told himselt that he would wait till twelve o'clock, and if "the fellow" (he called the man he suspected no harder name than that) did not turn up by that time, Mr. Cadly had determined to consult a clearer and less prejudiced head than his own on the matter that was troubling him so heavily.

But before the clock struck twelve the man who had taken Joe Cadly's niece from him came striding into the room with no outward sign of culpability or contrition about him, and Uncle Joe's heart hardened involuntarily.

"Good morning, Mr. Cadly," the visitor began cheerfully, almost jauntily. "I have come, very gladly too, at my wife's request to carry you off home with me. We can't think of allowing you to remain here."

"We'll have our conversation in a private room, sir."

Though Mr. Phillipps' heart stood still at the manner and the tone of the old chawbacon whom he was condescending to, he followed him to the private room without a word of remonstrance.

"You say you've come at your wife's request. I have been to Houndell, in Somersetshire, sir. Tell me who that other woman is who calls herself your wife?"

For a moment Mr. Phillipps was dumb with rage and a crawling sensation throughout his mind and body that must surely have been terror. Then he recovered command of at least one of his powers, that of speech, and hurled such a mass of invective at Uncle Joe as made that worthy old man, who was only accustomed to uncultivated rustic blasphemy, shiver.

When Mr. Cadly had been denounced in every variety of way which the fertile fancy of his adversary suggested, the latter paused for want of breath, and Uncle Joe took up the parable.

"Your words are hard and wicked enough, sir, but not so hard and wicked as your ways. I found that you were the man who had wronged the lady at Houndell, by accident, through no prying on my part or tale-telling on hers. I was there to show a pony to a little boy, and the little boy showed me the likeness of his father. Now, Mr. Phillipps, or Mr. Phillipps-Twysden, if that little boy is your son, *what is my niece?*"

For full a minute, and it seemed like an hour to the man who was watching him, Phillipps-Twysden stood motionless, his face buried in his hands. Then he raised his head and spoke, all trace of defiance gone both from his manner and voice.

"If I give you my word of honor that I will obliterate myself, will you spare her—Florence, the knowledge you have gained? She is blameless; she loves me; let her go on thinking me not utterly undeserving of her love. The truth would be the cruelest thing you could tell her, for my son, the little boy you saw at Houndell, is legitimate—his mother is my wife."

"You infernal blackguard! You have destroyed my poor innocent niece, you——"

The old man spluttered and nearly choked in his righteous wrath. As his words died away inarticulately from sheer exhaustion, the man he was upbraiding interposed humbly:

"I am all you declare me to be. I deserve even worse things than you would prepare for me if you were Providence. But you waste time when you employ it in describing and condemning my conduct. Let us both think now solely of what will be best for Florence."

"She shall never set eyes on you again. I will take my poor defiled flower home."

"She is not that," Phillipps-Twysden interrupted, with a roar, stamping his foot on the floor with a force and noise that brought an attentive waiter to the keyhole. "She is not that. Spare her a life of shame and remorse! Say what you like about me; say I am dead; I tell you I will obliterate myself; say what you like about me, only spare her."

"That appeal comes very prettily from you, don't it?" Uncle Joe said, piteously. "Spare her! 'tis you that should have spared her when she was a good, pure girl, and your idle wicked fancy was struck with her. What is she now? My God? My poor child! What is she now?"

"As good and pure as she was then. I am the sinner, but devil as I've been, I have not destroyed her purity or taught her familiarity with sin. Let her go on thinking herself my wife. You will only break her heart if you tell her what I am."

"There's something in that, but you must never see her again," Uncle Joe assented.

Then he looked cautiously at his enemy, and said compassionately:

"I can't be your judge, man. You've sinned, and you'll suffer for it so long as the Lord lets you cumber the earth. There! Stand up under the consequences of your sin. Don't crouch; don't break down just now when the courage that has served the devil so well is wanted for a better work. Tell me what words of explanation I can take to my niece that won't be lies, for them I won't speak, even to save her heart from breaking."

Phillipps-Twysden got up from the sofa on which he had flung himself a few moments before in despair, and moved to a part of the room on which the sun did not shine. Unconsciously he avoided light and brightness now.

"Wait for a day or two before you tell her anything," he pleaded. "I will go away—it doesn't matter where; only I give you my word of honor—oh! you doubt that; but don't doubt; try to believe—I will never see her again. If I saw her once more I should fight to keep her, and she would be wounded in the battle, so I won't fight. From this hour I will be dead to her, but you will let me leave her so that she'll never feel the world's bite and kick."

"I can take no money from you for Florence," Uncle Joe said stoutly.

"You know how to do executioner's work well, Mr. Cadly."

"I can't take your money for her," the old man repeated shaking his head. "But if money can keep her from being kicked and bitten by the world she shall have plenty from me."

"And you'll let her think herself my widow?"

"Mercy, man, you're not dead yet, and I'm not going to tell her that you are. The best I can do for her is to make her understand that you've offended the law and had

to leave the country. And if 'twould kill her, as you think, to know that she wasn't your wife after all, and that you'd tricked and ruined her, why she must go on thinking herself your wife and learn to bear the desertion and the rest of the shame."

"She shall not have to bear it long," Phillipps-Twysden avowed in his agony; and Uncle Joe caught the meaning of the words.

"Do you mean that you'll take the life the Almighty gave you, and that you've so misused, with your own hand? No, no, Mr. Phillipps-Twysden, you won't square your account that way. You look like a man, though you haven't shown much manliness yet. Live like one now. Leave a record for the little boy who's got my brown pony that he can speak of to his children when he grows up."

"I deserve to be shot like a dog," the beaten man cried brokenly.

"But we don't any of us get what we deserve," Uncle Joe said eagerly, and his eyes glistened with pardonably weak emotion. "There's just a few sainted women in this world who deserve nothing but good, but they generally spoil their chances of getting it by running double with a scamp. I mean," he explained hastily, not desiring to kick a man who was down so unmistakably, "I mean they take others' burdens on them and suffer for others' sins when they haven't any of their own. And now, sir, as I have to do what I'd sooner die almost than have to do, I'll bid you good-bye, and wish that you may find peace in doing better than you've done before."

"Let Florence sell the furniture at least and take what it makes."

"No, no, sir. The furniture and what it makes might go for part compensation to the woman you've wronged a bit less heavily than you've wronged my niece. The only thing you can do for her is to leave her without a sign of

you about her. She'll go back to the old place with me to-night, I hope, and time will be her best friend next to her mother. But there's one thing I promise you. If there's any spot on earth where she thinks she'll be happier than at Eastmoor, there I'll take her. She'll not have to bear any slights or any friendly sneers, for she shan't stay where they're offered to her. It will be one sin the less to your charge that she won't have to bear no snubs."

"If the day should come that she wishes to be free for the sake of some better fellow than myself, tell her that she *is* free; let her know then that her chain is an imaginary one."

"She'll have had enough of marriage and of men, I reckon."

"Still, let me have the poor comfort of hearing you say that you'll tell her the truth if you ever think the truth will make her happier."

"Trust me for that."

"And now good-bye, Mr. Cadly."

He was turning to go when Uncle Joe rose up.

"I'll not shake your hand," he said, simply, "but I'll give you a parting word that's better than good-bye. Take care of your life. With what's left, redeem what's past."

A minute later Uncle Joe was alone and Mr. Phillipps-Twysden was hurrying through the streets, feeling as if all men shrank from him, and fancied each moment that his progress would be arrested by someone with the legal right and might to interrupt his progress to that end which he had in view.

When Uncle Joe reached the house in Regent's Park he found the young mistress of it happily employed in that game of post with her household gods, which has such charms for many women. In other words Florence was altering, revising and improving the appearance of her pretty drawing room in order that it might have the charm of novelty for her husband when he came back, as a reward

for his having pleased her in the matter of calling on Uncle Joe.

She ran to the door to meet the latter when she heard his voice and step on the stairs. A flower-pot in one hand and a dusting-brush in the other, did not disable her from welcoming him with warmth and almost childish heartiness.

"I knew you'd come, you old darling Uncle Joe. I knew you wouldn't stand out against Jack, though you did against me. Do you like my house? Don't you think this room is pretty? You'd never think we were really in dingy smoky London, now would you, Uncle Joe?"

He turned and shut the door behind them gently, without giving so much as one glance at the pretty room of which she was as proud as a child might have been of a new toy. Then he took her firmly by both hands and looked at her with such pitying kindness that her heart foreboded evil at once.

"Sit steady, and send your heart over the roughest, biggest thing you've ever gone at, my girl," he whispered, nearly sobbing. "You'll have to leave the pretty home and all it means to you and come back to the old ones, who'll try to bind up your wounds. You'll have to leave all you love here, Flo, for the man who married you has left you."

"Then he is dead."

She wrenched herself from her uncle's grasp as she uttered her moan. In a moment more she was on her knees sobbing, but listening keenly while he made it plain to her that she was "worse than widowed—left!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

TRIED BY FIRE.

It was more than a week since Uncle Joe had dealt out his definition and decided that there was no alternative for Phillipps-Twysden but to relinquish Florence once and for ever.

What he had done with himself in the interim he could not have told even if perfect remission here below of all his sins had been the price of his ample confession. He supposed he had gone along living in an ordinary sort of way —dressing and dining and going to bed and getting up. But he did not feel sure about it. His memory was beginning to play him false. The only things he clearly remembered, the only things that never slipped out of his recollection, were these facts, namely, that he had been a blackguard to the only two women whom he had ever loved or who had ever loved him, and a fiend of a father to the little boy whom he loved so dearly that the words "I'd give my life any day for little Jack," were not false, idle and vain as were the majority of his utterances.

He had hung about between his chambers and club—going to the latter at such times as he deemed it probable the men he knew best would not be there—by day, and at night he had gone and looked at the exterior of the house where he had lived that brief life of false unstable bliss with Florence.

As a rule the only light in the house came from the kitchen windows, but one evening the drawing-room was brilliantly illuminated, and the sound of the piano, very badly played, fell upon his ears.

Standing back against the park railings and watching the

shadows that crossed and recrossed the curtained windows, he soon came to the conclusion that it was not poor Florence and her friends making merry, as he had at first vainly imagined. It was evidently a servants' carouse, and clearly it was his duty to interrupt and end it.

He had his latch-key in his pocket, and in a few moments he had let himself in and gained the door of the drawing-room. As he did this the thumping and scraping of many awkward and untrained feet ceased, and he walked in upon an abashed and astonished assemblage of persons who were engaged in mopping up their heated inflamed visages and drinking his dry champagne out of half-pint tumblers.

At his first angry exclamation the visitors huddled together and slunk out of the room, leaving the cook and parlor-maid to explain the situation to the best of their ability.

If he had not been so utterly miserable on his own account, the scene would have been full of comedy for him. Cook was a large unwrinkled fat round woman of fifty, with a certain comfortable comeliness about her that looked a flat contradiction of the larcenous proceeding of which she was just found guilty. She was also gifted with a loud glib Cornish tongue that was always glad to enlarge upon or explain any and every circumstance which either concerned or did not concern her. As she stood now before her master, with a bumper of his best champagne in her hand, and a gold chain—the gift of a former mythical employer—on her black-silk bound breast, the expression on her fat, undaunted face was a study.

"You're welcome as the flowers in May, sir," she began, with fawning effusiveness. "As Joe said to all callers and enquirers, 'Don't tell me that my master, Mr. Phillipps, who is a perfect gentleman and not one of your mean, prying, sly, half-bred ones, isn't coming back to his own lawful home; and don't tell me,' Joe added, 'that my lady, Mrs. Phillips, has run away from husband and home and

happiness at the word of an old country farmer-like fellow that had no gentleman's ways with him.'"

"Hold your tongue, woman, and send the crew you've got here about their business before I give you all in charge for robbing my cellar and destroying my furniture."

"They shall go, sir, at once. Not for a moment shall anyone stay in the house who isn't quite agreeable to you; though as for robbing your cellar, there's not one party among them who'd demean himself, or herself for the matter of that, by drinking wine that wasn't honestly bought and paid for out of my pocket."

As she made her bare-face assertion cook bridled and drew her short round-about figure up to its fullest height, and sniffed defiance at her employer.

"Don't take the trouble to tell me any lies," he said wearily. "Send your thievish tipsy friends away, and follow them as soon as you've told me what wages are due to you and I've paid them. I don't care whether you've drunk every drop of wine that was left in the cellar or not —you look as if you had done it—I only want to get rid of the sight and the sound of you; so understand, you had better never apply to me for a character, for I'll give you one you don't like if you do."

"Certainly not, sir; not by no persuasion whatever would I compresend—I mean condemeaner—to apply for a character to one who was that neglectful of the 'ole dooty of man as to absent hisself from his lawful wife and home, and go away on the stream, as one may say, of wicious pleasure with your this and your that whose not known to quiet and 'spectable folks that stays at home and minds their own business, and reads pious pamphlets that was written for their learning by my Bishop, who held me in that esteem that before he died he sent for me to say that mine was the best beetroot pickle the Lord had ever permitted him to taste. I'm not a boaster, Mr. Phillipps, and I'm not a scoffer, and I'm not a wain, wicious woman; so I sweep

the dust off your shoes ere I depart, Mr. Phillipps, and may you never know the pangs of an accusive conscience which should cut you short in your wickedness, when you're telling an honest widow, who was that prized by her Bishop for her beet pickle and other things not worthy to be named to sons of Belial, that she—he—don't do accordin' to what's right."

"Go out of the room this instant, and out of the house in half an-hour, you drunken old faggot," he interrupted, with more veracity than civility. The truth was as usual unpalatable.

"Out of the room and your house! 'Tis my designation to go, sir," she replied with solemnity that was rendered more impressive by a lurch in his direction that made him leap out of her radius in a spasm of angry embarrassment. "And with one glass towards our parting friendship, which was never of my seeking, I leave you."

With this sentiment, in tones that ranged with wild and fitful velocity from grave to gay, from hiccoughing hilarity to solemn efforts to be articulate, cook drifted in a rudderless manner out of the room, and the man who had been master there was left alone to contemplate the altered sickening moral and physical aspect and atmosphere of all things.

Presently he heard the footsteps of the servant's departing friends, and soon afterwards the parlor-maid, who was still sober, came to him for her own and cook's wages. Shortly after that the house was empty and he was out in the streets with his heavy thoughts alone—a wealthy homeless man.

Through the long hours of this, which he kept on trying to determine should be his last night on earth, he walked in an aimless way through miles of unfamiliar streets and squares and terraces. He was having views of London that he had never looked upon before, and seeing phases of life of which he had never dreamt. It was a sort of

comfort to him that the whole of the night side of nature was not bad. He caught glimpses of human kindness that were pathetic in their well-meant inefficacy to remedy the evils they approached. He saw tender children on whose brows surely the light of God was shining, supporting and guiding home the helpless carcases of drunken fathers and mothers, whose besetting sin had robbed those homes of every human attribute save the imperishable love of their children. He saw fleshless creatures in flaunting rags and a state of semi-starvation (the sure wages of sin and shame when these latter come to be embodied in a form that is unattractive and revolting to look upon), sharing their last horribly earned shilling with some fellow who had earned nothing. He saw doctors and priests wending their way with equal haste and zeal to houses that were nearly palaces and to hovels where their presence was claimed by the sick and the dying. He even saw a kitchen-maid, who was supposed by one of the polite fictions current in domestic service to be sweeping the area steps in the dawning light, turn from the blandishment of Policeman B. to give some scraps to a starving dog.

In spite of all he knew about himself it was borne in upon him that there was something besides sin and selfishness in the poor old world which he was so anxious to quit after all.

There was a hot haze hanging over everything when he got himself to the Paddington station the next day and took his ticket to the nearest railway point to Houndell. It was in his mind that he would go up to the house and send some messenger whom he might chance to find by the wayside with a note to Violet, asking her if she would let him see Jack. He knew so well beforehand what her answer would be. He knew she would never intervene between him and his boy. But in spite of this knowledge he wanted to feel that it would be told after the end had come—that the relations between his wife and himself were so amicable that she had told the boy to go to him.

It was a pleasant walk from the station to the Houndell gates. You could keep by the side of a river along field paths the whole way, and to-day the river was bordered gloriously with meadow-sweet and yellow flags of wild iris. Between these glorious borders of bloom the river ran swiftly. He began to think as he walked by and watched its rushing waters that the end might as well come here as in the Thames.

Now and again as he walked along he found himself trying to foreshadow what he would be feeling when he came to this same spot on his walk back to the station. Would he ever reach the latter? Would not the temptation to end it all be too strong upon him after taking leave of little Jack for anything like train-catching and ticket taking? His wanderings during the night had weakened him. He could not contemplate without tears the picture of the man who should retrace his footsteps by and by after that last interview with his little son.

There was something pathetic in the perfume of the meadow-sweet. The same flower grew, he remembered, on the bank of that reach of the river which he had selected as the most admirable site for the end. He gathered a bit of it and put it in his buttonhole, where its scent developed to an extent that made him sick and faint before he reached the Houndell gates—the gates of his wife's home, which were morally closed to him.

A little sloping-shouldered lad mounted on a resolute-looking donkey was nearly over-balancing himself in his efforts to reach the gate-bell as Mr. Phillipps came up.

"Here, you; you're ring——" the boy was beginning, when he looked again and altered his tone. "I'll send 'un along the drive, sir, and let 'em know you're coming," the little Mercury gasped out. "Master Jack, he's always a waitin' for you. He'll be rare pleased."

It was only the voice of a little village lad who knew

nothing about him save that he was the father of "Master Jack up at house." Nevertheless he was so overstrained by remorse and his last night's vigil that he almost sobbed as he said—

"Thank you, my little man; get on as fast as you can and bring Master Jack out to meet me."

The gate was open now and the boy, urging his donkey to its utmost speed with whoop and whack, careered up the avenue. As he neared the house he saw his mistress and Master Jack come out on to the terrace through the window that opened like a door, and full of importance as the giver of glad tidings he shouted out before he came up close to them—

"Master Jack, your pa's comin' up the drive."

"Run, run to meet him, Jack."

Violet need not have told him to do it. Jack was out of reach of his mother's voice before her last word was spoken. Then for a moment she, the injured, insulted, deserted wife; she, the owner of the land on which she stood—of the fine old house from which she had just issued—hesitated. Should she allow the father of her child to feel that his presence was tolerated there simply on that ground, or should she bury her wrong for the hour and spare him the humiliation he so well deserved?

It was only for a moment that she hesitated, then her better nature triumphed.

"Go in and tell cook that Mr. Phillipps-Twysden, her master, is coming, and will dine here. Perhaps he may be able to stay the night. His rooms must be prepared for him, tell Coates, while I walk up to meet him."

"So he ain't run away from her as folks say?" Cook remarked to Coates when the donkey-boy delivered his message. "Dear life! If I had a husband who pleased hisself away from me till he couldn't please hisself any longer and then walked in without so much as with your

leave, or by your leave, I'd let him know that I was a woman, and not a worm to be trampled on."

"Anyhow, I'm glad he's coming," the more philosophic Coates remarked. "Twill be better like with a man in the house. Pleased enough Master Jack will be, too, for he's always talking about his pa," she added as she went off to see to the airing and ordering of the rooms that had always been appropriated to the use of Mr. Phillipps-Twysden.

"It must have been wexin' to him to find that everything here was left to her instead of him. It wexes most men not to have their wives dependent on them like," Cook said to a select audience of kitchen-maid and donkey-boy.

They both agreed with her heartily, the donkey-boy adding a rider to the effect that "'tworn't natural that the missus should be master," and that "he seemed as nice a gentleman as he (the speaker) would care to live with."

Jack was mounted on his father's shoulder by the time Violet met them. He put the boy down, lifted his hat, and waited for her to speak.

Intuition told her that Florence—that other woman—had left him, and that he had come here solely to see his boy, with no hope of gaining her forgiveness. Perhaps he did not care to have it. Perhaps he only despaired of winning it. Perhaps—she could not conjecture further; she could tell herself what she wished. She only felt that something must be done to relieve the excruciating awkwardness of the moment.

"I am glad you have come," she began, holding out her hand to him. "Run up to the house, Jack, and come back to meet us on the donkey. I will walk up slowly with papa."

When the strings of a boyish heart are being pulled by a long-absent father at one end of an avenue and a donkey at the other the struggle may be severe, but it is invariably

brief, and as invariably it ends in the donkey gaining the victory.

Jack was a very affectionate little boy, but he was also an essentially human little boy. He was off before his father —who clung to his presence for protection—could interfere to detain him.

"Violet, you are an angel to look at me, to speak to me. I only dared hope that you would let me see Jack. I shouldn't have forced myself upon you if—if things were as they have been. But I ought to tell you that she, the poor girl I have wronged so horribly, has left me—left me the same hour she discovered that I had been a scoundrel to her."

"Poor girl. She has more to forgive than I have."

They walked on in silence for several yards after this. Then Violet spoke again.

"No one knows from me—no one will ever know. You at least do me that much justice? You feel sure that our boy will always love and respect you if he listens to me?"

"God bless you, Violet!"

"As Jack grows up he must be with you often—as much as he is with me; and when he wants to know what parted us he must be told that we quarelled, but he must never, never know the cause. It is my right to ask this much of you—that you never shame me by letting our boy know that you loved that other woman better than you did me, and that I was jealous of your preference."

"Your terms are too generous."

"One more question," she added in a very low tone of voice. "I am a rich woman. Will that poor girl have means that will lift her above and away from the world's hard scornful pity when her parents are no longer able to protect and maintain her? If she will not you must help me to devise some plan by which I can secure a competence to her without her even suspecting from whom it comes."

"As far as money goes she will be well off. I shouldn't dare to help you to aid her in that way."

"No, you have injured her too deeply. I must find some other agent," Violet assented, thoughtfully.

And then another irksome pause would have occurred if little Jack had not put in an opportune appearance on the donkey.

Poor Violet had kept up a calm front up to this turn. But when she saw her husband running along by the side of the happy unsuspicious little son who loved him so well, a big lump rose in her throat, and anguish almost paralysed her heart as she realised that things were not at all as they seemed to the child. Then another phase of feeling supervened, and her soul rose in indignant revolt at the rememberance of that heartless fickle villainy of his which had placed them all in such a miserable false position.

This walk of a quarter of a mile up the avenue with him alone had been difficult and trying enough. How should she get through the remainder of the day in his estranged company without dying in spirit from pain and awkwardness and constraint? She prayed for the blessed peaceful night to come, when he would surely relieve her of a presence that was so exquisitely painful to her that she knew it must still be dear.

When they had dined—still having little Jack with them because each dreaded being alone with the other—he went away, Jack clinging to him to the last, and by so doing sadly weakening that resolution of his to bring the end about speedily; and at parting Violet touched his hand, and suffered him to press his lips to her forehead in response to Jack's order that "Papa should kiss mamma too."

Then he went away feeling that he should never see them again.

Violet sat up late that night. For two or three hours after the rest of the household were in bed she sat up reading and trying to forget her husband. When at length her head touched the pillow she was asleep within

five minutes, but her unhappiness and the pathos of it pursued her into dreamland.

She had been in bed about an hour when something horribly heavy pressed down upon her and tried to choke her. Waking with a painful effort to scream she found the atmosphere dense with smoke save where brilliant tongues of flame were licking round the doors and woodwork of the room. Stumbling out of bed, distracted, scorched and choking, she made her way towards the doorway into the next room where little Jack was sleeping. Before she could reach it she fell, and the rest was a blank.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NOT FOUND WANTING.

By the merest chance Phillipps-Twysden missed the only train that stopped for the night at the little Meadsford station. There was a clean little public-house close by that called itself the "Meadsford Arms," and in this he was able to secure a tiny bed-room, highly perfumed with sweet lavender and cleanliness. He, too, was overstrained mentally and physically. His legs shook under him as he went upstairs, and his lips quivered nervously as he refused all the landlady's offers of refreshments.

As he flung himself, still partially dressed, upon the bed, he remembered that this—if his resolution held good—was his last night on earth. He turned shuddering from side to side, striving to force the recollection of his intention from his mind, and compel sleep to soothe his tired brain and aching eyeballs. But do what he would he remained more painfully wide awake than he had ever been in his life, and at last he rose up and went to the window, and looked away over the rivers and meadows to Houndell, buried in its woods on the hill side.

Looked—but only for an instant. Then just staying to put his boots on and fasten them, hatless and coatless he rushed out of the inn shouting—

"Fire! fire at Houndell! Rouse the neighborhood. Ten thousand pounds to the savior of my son!"

There were good gallopers in the stable, and in less time than it takes to write these words they were bearing men seeking the aid of fire-engines to Weston and Clifton. Phillipps-Twysden seized the first horse that was led out, a high-breasted old hunter, and it bore him straight as an arrow to the burning doors of Houndell.

No one ever knew how he did it, for the staircase was in sheets of flame, but presently he was seen by the servants (who had saved themselves with commendable forethought, and were howling hopelessly and helplessly on the terrace) with a huge bundle in his arms.

He had found his wife and child together, and made Violet understand that he would save both if she surrendered all independent action and clung to him. Then he wrapped Jack in a thick rug, and guiding Violet through the blinding smoke over the burning floors he reached a window, and made the group huddled below grasp the fact that a ladder must be planted to reach up to it.

When this was done Violet made her fainting voice heard.

"Go first with Jack," she panted.

But he compelled her to go out, while he wrapped Jack tighter in the thick woolen rug. Then, when she was in safety outside on the ground, he stepped out, the flames seeming to envelope him from head to foot. As he neared the bottom he flung the boy into arms that were open to receive him. Then there was a collapse of ladder and man, and before water could quench the flames that raged round him the end had come for Phillipps-Twysden.

But not a hair of little Jack's head was singed, not an inch of his dear delicate skin was scorched. As Violet

always taught him, "His father loved him so" that he had given his life for his boy, and her own heart added that he had nobly redeemed his errors.

The journals of the day rang with the story. His heroism, his devotion to wife and child, were the themes of the hour.

Florence Arle, reading the report of how he died, held up her head triumphantly and defied them to say he was not worthy of the love of woman. She was so proud of his bravery and the sacrifice of his life for his little son that she quite forgave him that impious love for herself which had led him on to ruin her. She sent crosses and wreaths to put on his coffin, and wore mourning for him that was only a shade less deep than Violet's. And while she did these things some people who had looked askance at and scouted her before were startled with admiration and respect for her.

Houndell House was burnt to the ground, but in its ruins Violet found a thing of such value that it comforted her for the rest of her days, and this was the fact that after all her husband had loved his son better than his life.

* * * * * *

"And now," said Lady Susan, when she had read the report of Phillipps-Twysden's ghastly, gallant end—"and now, Lionel, Violet is a free woman?"

"Yes, she is, poor thing."

"And you are a free man, my dear friend. Thank God mamma hadn't hustled you into a marriage with me before this catastrophe. Violet will value you now."

"You surely can't imagine that I can take my freedom?"

"But I insist upon giving it to you. I force you back into the position of the faithful knight who will live and die for the love of one lady."

He fought against accepting the liberty she pressed upon him for some time, but not very vigorously. However,

she admitted no appeal against her decision by telling all her friends that the engagement was off between Sir Lionel and herself for reasons that made them stauncher friends than ever.

"You've done it for my sake, I know, Susan, but he no more loves me now than I do him. You have given up your happiness for an idea."

About twelve months after Violet said this Sir Lionel went down to Eastmoor and took his bride openly in the sight of all who knew her from the hands of her uncle, old Joe Cadly, the horse-breeder.

Lady Susan had not sacrificed her happiness for "an idea" but for Florence Arle.

THE END.

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